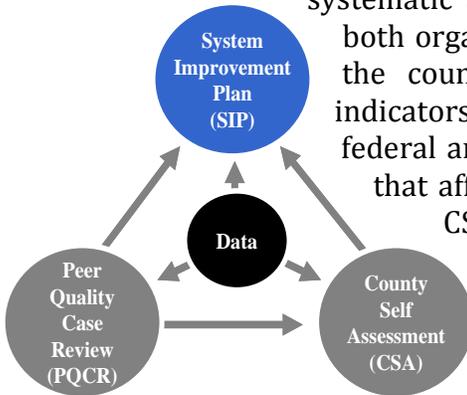


Sonoma County Human Services Department
Sonoma County Probation Department
2013 Sonoma County Self Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation County Self-Assessment (CSA)** is a systematic approach to examining the strengths and challenge areas for both organizations. This assessment, which is a collaborative process of the county and its stakeholders, includes analysis of a variety of indicators of child and family well-being; agency performance in all federal and state outcome areas; policy, procedural and systemic factors that affect county performance; and the availability of resources. The CSA also includes a **Peer Case Review** intended to provide counties with issue-specific, qualitative, case-level information gathered by external peer experts. This Self-Assessment process is mandated and outlined by the Federal Children and Family Services Review and takes place every five years in each California County.



The findings and themes that emerge during the CSA process serve as the foundation for the **System Improvement Plan**. The SIP acts as the county’s roadmap for system improvements, as well as the operational agreement between the county and the state in the local implementation of strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes of children and their families. This report will form the basis of the Sonoma County 2014-2019 System Improvement Plan.



County Self Assessment Process

The 2013 County Self-Assessment process included 3 large community meetings and 16 focus groups. 216 individuals attended these meetings representing a wide variety of child welfare and probation stakeholders including county staff, current and former foster and probation youth, foster parents, group homes, mental health, public health, Indian Child

Welfare experts representing local Native American tribes, education, child care, prevention partners community-based organizations and others. Input from these groups were used in conjunction with quantitative analysis of county performance on federal outcome measures to create a portrait of county strengths and challenges in all aspects of the child welfare and probation systems.

“I think it’s the county that wants to improve and all of us too, even after all the things we went through. This is probably one of the best counties to be in foster care.” – current foster youth and focus group participant

Measure	Measure Description	2012 Sonoma	2012 California	State/National Target	Change since last SIP	Action moving forward
OUTCOME MEASURES						
Outcome measures tell us how Sonoma County children and families involved with the Child Welfare System are faring historically and in comparison to state/national targets.						
SAFETY	No Recurrence of Maltreatment <i>This measures repeat maltreatment.</i>	93.8%	93.1%	>94.6%	Improvement	WATCH
	No Recurrence of Maltreatment in foster care	100%	99.6%	>99.68%	No change	STRENGTH
PERMANENCY	Reunification Score <i>This measures successful family reunification following removal.</i>	107.9	113.0	>122.6	No change	SIP
	Adoption Score <i>This measures successful adoption if reunification is not an option.</i>	120.4	114.0	>106.4	Improvement	STRENGTH/ WATCH
	Exits to Permanency Score <i>This measures exits from foster care for children in care for an extended time period.</i>	98.7	110.9	>121.7	Decline	SIP
	Placement Stability Score <i>This measures the number of placement transitions while in foster care.</i>	98.2	99.8	>101.5	Decline	STRENGTH/ WATCH
PROCESS MEASURES						
Process measures that reflect county performance in meeting regulatory standards on timeliness of social worker visits and investigations.						
SAFETY	Timely Response (Child Abuse Investigations) <i>This measures the timeliness of response to investigate child abuse allegations.</i>	94.5% (IR)	98% (IR)	>90%	No change	EXPLORE
		81.9% (10-Day)	93.5% (10-Day)			
	Timely Social Worker Contacts <i>This measures the timeliness and regularity of ongoing contact between social workers and youth.</i>	85%	93.4%	>90%	No change	SIP
WELL-BEING OUTCOMES						
Outcome and process measures that reflect county performance in ensuring that children are well-cared for while in foster care.						
WELL-BEING	Older Youth Self-Sufficiency. <i>Measures an array of self-sufficiency outcomes for youth who exited foster care placement due to having reached the age of majority. Due to data issues, the data could not be analyzed.</i>					EXPLORE

Measure	Measure Description	2012 Sonoma	2012 California	State/ National Target	Change since last SIP	Action moving forward
	Siblings Placed Together. <i>This measure shows the rate at which sibling groups are placed together in foster care. There is no state target for this. Sonoma County has remained steady at 61%.</i>					WATCH
	Least Restrictive Placement. <i>This set of measures looks at placement type at the time of removal and for points in time every quarter thereafter. Sonoma County uses Valley of the Moon and emergency foster homes most often as the first placement for children after removal. For long term foster care, Sonoma County's rate of youth in group homes exceeds the state rate.</i>					SIP
	ICWA Placement. <i>This measure shows the number of Native American children who are placed in foster homes with caregivers who are also Native American. Due to training and data issues, the data could not be analyzed.</i>					IDENTIFY
	Health/Dental. <i>These measures count the number of children in foster care who received well-child exams and dental exams according to the established periodicity. Both measures have improved in the last 3 years. There are too few doctors and dentists in Sonoma County that accept Medi-Cal.</i>					STRENGTH/ WATCH
	Psychotropic Medication. <i>This measure provides the percent of children in foster care who have been authorized to receive psychotropic medications. The rate in Sonoma County in 2012 was 24.4% compared to 13.4% for the state as a whole.</i>					SIP
	Education. <i>This measure reflects the percentage of Sonoma County children in foster care who have ever had an Individualized Education Plan. Due to flawed data collection methods, data could not be analyzed.</i>					IDENTIFY
SYSTEMIC FACTORS Systemic factors are conditions that enable positive child welfare outcomes to exist. There are no state required quantitative measures nor targets for systemic factors.						
Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention	Sonoma County has a core group of committed foster parents who assist the county in shaping policy and in improving programmatic outcomes. Having enough foster homes to meet the placement and cultural needs of children in care is systemic precondition for improving child welfare outcomes, including timely reunification and exits to permanency. In January 2013 there were 100 county-licensed foster homes, of which 52 were <i>actively</i> accepting placements from the county. This does not include relative homes approved for placement and foster homes licensed through foster family agencies.					SIP
Service Array	Children and families must have access to an array of effective, community-based and culturally appropriate services in order to remediate the problems that brought them to the attention of child welfare or probation in the first place. The availability of such services is a systemic precondition for improving child welfare outcomes. Family, Youth & Children's Services currently contracts with 163 service providers.					WATCH
STRENGTH – Existing practice strength; will not be included in the 2014-2019 System Improvement Plan SIP – Will be addressed in 2014-2019 System Improvement Plan WATCH – Performance is close to the state target or there has been a recent and significant practice change; will be addressed in 2014-2019 System Improvement Plan IDENTIFY – Data collection issues have been identified and will require additional research before strategies can be developed EXPLORE – Underperformance on an outcome measure but where more detailed analysis is needed before implementing changes.						

Stakeholder Identified Strengths and Challenges

County staff, clients and the community identified the following overarching themes as strengths and challenges of the child welfare and juvenile probation systems:

1. All individuals who work with children and families involved with the child welfare and juvenile probation systems care deeply about child and family well-being.
2. **Safety, permanency and well-being outcomes** would improve if youth and families were engaged early on as a driver in their own case planning.
3. Service providers, community members, tribal representatives, educators and other stakeholders want to more fully participate in case planning.
4. The recruitment of more foster homes, particularly treatment foster homes (foster homes that are equipped to care for children with more intensive health, developmental and emotional needs) and those who will accept older youth, is the cornerstone to having a full continuum of foster care in Sonoma County. Sonoma County has a high rate of youth placed in group homes, in part due to the lack of treatment foster homes.
5. Permanency outcomes for young children are very good and could inform improvements to programs and services for older youth whose permanency outcomes are not as positive.
6. The community wants improved outreach and education about child abuse and reporting.
7. Sonoma County boasts a wide array of community-based services but there continue to be barriers to clients' ability to seamlessly access services. These barriers are particularly acute for Spanish-speaking families and families who live in outlying areas.
8. Stakeholders' (including youth and parents) experience of the child welfare system varies depending upon the social worker assigned. There is variation in practice across the entire spectrum of the child welfare system.

Conclusions

Sonoma County has a long history of providing high-quality child welfare services to children, youth, families and the community. Social workers develop and maintain strong relationships with their clients and go above and beyond to ensure their well-being. The Human Services Department provides a diverse and plentiful array of effective prevention and treatment services and has strong partnerships in the community. And yet for myriad reasons outlined in this report, outcomes for young children are better than the outcomes for older youth. Older youth who have been in foster care for an extended time period tend to remain in foster care rather than exiting to a forever family.

The focus of the Probation Department during the past CSA term was a commitment to specific, measurable improvements in performance outcomes which the Department felt would positively impact child safety, permanency and well-being. Efforts have been focused on maintaining youth in the community and providing pre-placement services to a larger number of youth and families; however, the number of out-of-home placement cases continues to rise.

Next Steps

As they move into the development of the 2014-2019 System Improvement Plan, the Human Services and Probation Departments will continue to engage stakeholders, including families and youth, in identifying effective strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for the individuals they serve. The SIP will build on the strengths identified in the 2013 CSA and provide evidence-informed solutions and strategies to the barriers and challenges it outlines, which will lead to more positive outcomes for youth and families.