

Quarterly Child Protection Checkup: *Assessing Child Protection Reform in Los Angeles County*

Introduction

The hearing room where Los Angeles County's powerful Board of Supervisors meets is cavernous: a 640-seat auditorium, fit for making public policy decisions that affect a county more populous than 43 U.S. states.

One of the most under-attended but fascinating shows playing out on this big stage is the steady advance of a "transition team"¹ established to maintain the county's focus on improving child protection.

It is October 27, 2014. A half dozen transition team members are huddled behind their podiums on the hearing room floor. They speak amongst themselves - through microphones - about progress made towards implementing a 42-point list of recommendations² offered by the county's Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection (BRC) in April.

In the front row sits Philip Browning, director of the county's Department of Children and Family Services, and Astrid Heger, executive director of the Violence Intervention Program at Los Angeles County-U.S.C. Medical Center, one of the medical hubs³ intended to better assess and treat children who have been identified by county child abuse investigators.

No more than 10 other guests dot the vast expanse of open seats.

In June,⁴ hundreds poured into the now empty hearing hall to watch the Board of Supervisors vote 4-1 to approve all of the BRC's recommendations.

Since then, the transition team has steadily pushed for reform, at times growing frustrated⁵ with the obstinacy of some Supervisors and the pace of their movement towards actionable goals.

¹ Loudenback, Jeremy. (June 26, 2014) "LA County Board of Supes Names Blue Ribbon Transition Team," *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/la-county-board-of-supes-names-blue-ribbon-transition-team/7320>

² Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. (April 18, 2014). *The Road to Safety for Our Children, Final Report of the Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection*: http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/brc/BRCCP_Final_Report_April_18_2014.pdf

³ Conover, Lily (2013). *Chronic Health Conditions More Common Among Children in Child Welfare System*. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/research/chronic-health-conditions-more-common-among-children-in-child-welfare-system/5619>

⁴ Therolf, Garret. (June 10, 2014). L.A. County supervisors vote to hire 'child protection czar'. *The Los Angeles Times*: <http://www.latimes.com/local/countygovernment/la-me-foster-reform-20140611-story.html>

“The greatest role of the transition team is not to make policy,” said transition team co-chair Leslie Gilbert-Lurie in an interview, “but to keep pressure on them [the Board of Supervisors] to act on the ‘state of the emergency’ they endorsed when they approved the Blue Ribbon Commission report.”

The only official tools the transition team has to maintain this pressure is through scheduled monthly presentations before the Board of Supervisors, and issuing letters asking the Supervisors to act.

Outside of these official channels, the news media plays a vital role in maintaining pressure on county leaders to keep child protection reform moving forward.

Since November 2013, FMC’s online news site, *The Chronicle of Social Change*, has published 39 stories on the BRC reform process. These stories have been linked to, reposted or followed by alternative and mainstream news outlets 34 times.

More than 90 days ago, Fostering Media Connections issued its first “Quarterly Child Protection Checkup,”⁶ which assessed how much the county had done to implement the reforms it had committed to.

In this second edition, we will provide a detailed examination of the pace of reform in the months since.

The major takeaways are:

- The transition team has made considerable headway in implementing the Blue Ribbon Commission’s recommendations, despite its limited power.
 - **Most notably, the BOS voted to release \$1.231 million in funding to beef up the county’s Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System⁷ on November 5th.⁸** This came after a request letter drafted by the transition team on October 27.^{9,10}

⁵ Loudenback, Jeremy (Oct. 8, 2014). Los Angeles Supes Urged to Take Action on Maltreatment Prevention and Child Abuse Reporting System. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-supes-urged-to-take-action-on-maltreatment-prevention-child-abuse-reporting-system/8276>

⁶ Fostering Media Connections. (Aug. 5, 2014). Quarterly Child Protection Checkup: http://fosteringmediaconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/L.A._Child_Protection_Checkup_08.05.14_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Renick, Christie. (Feb. 23, 2014). Los Angeles’ Child Abuse Reporting System Underfunded & Underutilized. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-award-winning-child-abuse-reporting-system-underfunded-underutilized/5341>

⁸ County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. (Oct. 31, 2014). Corrections and/or additions to the agenda for the Board meeting of Wednesday, November 5, 2014.

<http://bos.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=LBCJCHmZqw%3d&portalid=1>

⁹ Transition Team for the Office of Child Protection (Nov. 5, 2014). Release of Funding for Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System (E-SCARS): <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/89407.pdf>

¹⁰ *The Chronicle of Social Change* published nine stories about Los Angeles’s E-SCARS system starting in Feb. 2014. *The Los Angeles Daily News* followed *The Chronicle*’s coverage of wide discrepancies in how law enforcement agencies respond to reports of suspected child abuse. (See: New “Explosive Figures on Law Enforcement Response



November 10, 2014

- Focusing new attention on maltreatment prevention and early intervention.¹¹
- The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has made progress by:
 - Taking steps to increase foster care payments to relative caregivers.¹²
 - Creating a new predictive risk modeling tool to address critical child maltreatment threats.¹³
 - Examining the efficacy of the current system to recruit foster family homes.
- The county has moved substantively closer to creating a new Office of Child Protection¹⁴ charged with integrating child-serving agencies to better protect children.

Understanding the news media's unique power to impel action, Fostering Media Connections is offering these quarterly checkups in the hopes that they will spur continued attention and nourish the reform effort.

We are not advocates, but rather a clutch of journalists focused on the process of implementing the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommended reforms.

We have used the transition team's "Recommendation Matrix"¹⁵ as a template to track the county's progress on the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. The commission's April recommendations are broken into broader categories, each of which includes a list of related recommendations, any action taken to date and any impending action.

Through original reporting, we aim to make this admittedly bureaucratic document come to life, and show where the reform effort is moving forward and where it has stalled.

Our hope is that county leadership, the child protection and child welfare communities, and our colleagues in the news media will use our second "Child Protection Checkup" to

to Child Abuse in LA County" [May 8, 2014]: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/analysis/rolling-the-dice-on-child-abuse-in-long-beach-la-county/6517>

¹¹ Loudenback, Jeremy (Oct. 8, 2014). Los Angeles Supes Urged to Take Action on Maltreatment Prevention and Child Abuse Reporting System. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-supes-urged-to-take-action-on-maltreatment-prevention-child-abuse-reporting-system/8276>

¹² Renick, Christie. (Sept. 30, 2014). Los Angeles Opts Into State Relative Caregiver Funding Program. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-opts-into-state-relative-caregiver-funding-program/8234>

¹³ Heimpel, Daniel (Oct. 27, 2014). Preventive Analytics. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/preventive-analytics/8384>

¹⁴ Heimpel, Daniel. (Oct. 9, 2014). Judge Michael Nash Eyes Child Protection's Bully Pulpit. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/judge-michael-nash-eyes-child-protections-bully-pulpit/8285>

¹⁵ Transition Team for the Office of Child Protection. (Oct. 7, 2014). Status Update on the Implementation of the Implementation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection Recommendations: <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/87415.pdf>

November 10, 2014

better understand and accelerate the pace of change to improve the lives of vulnerable children.

We accept this checkup's limitations. First, we have only listed those recommendations that we thought imminently actionable and of highest importance. Second, we have focused most of our attention on those recommendations that have seen the most movement. Thus, this enterprise is biased by what we, our sources, and the powers that be have designated as important.

While transition team meetings may not amount to much in terms of spectator draw, what happens during these meetings is extremely important.

Los Angeles' child protection system is the largest in the country. If county leaders can stay the course, what happens in that empty hearing room may set the standard for how the whole country grapples with a fundamental question: how can you orient public services to better prevent child maltreatment and protect children?



Quarterly Checkups

Each category in this checkup includes a description of why it is important, the progress to date and any future opportunities for advancement within the category.

The categories of reform and the particular recommendations we tackle in this report are as follows:

I. Consolidation of Authority

The BRC called for an Office of Child Protection¹⁶ to oversee and integrate child-serving agencies around the goal of preventing and responding to child maltreatment, and to promote general child welfare. To accomplish this, the commission first directed the Board of Supervisors to name an “oversight team” (transition team) to set the parameters for that office.¹⁷ Finally, the Board of Supervisors will hire a director for the new office.¹⁸

II. Maltreatment Prevention and Early Intervention

The BRC called for a more rigorous early intervention system to mitigate the potential for maltreatment after an allegation of abuse is reported to the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) or law enforcement. It also made recommendations that, while outside the purview of classic child protection, would bolster maltreatment prevention efforts.

In terms of early intervention, the BRC called for the county to adopt a risk-assessment model developed by Eckerd, a private child-welfare service provider based in Florida. Eckerd aggregates information about prior incidences with child protective services and other factors to rate the relative danger to children¹⁹ to help it gauge risk of future maltreatment.

The BRC also recommended that the county send public-health nurses out with DCFS investigators on every investigation of an allegation of child maltreatment for children under age 1. In addition, the BRC recommended that all children

¹⁶ Renick, Christie. (Jan. 22, 2014). A Child Safety Czar for Los Angeles. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/a-child-safety-czar-for-los-angeles/4976>

¹⁷ Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. (April 18, 2014). The Road to Safety for Our Children, Final Report of the Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection: http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/brc/BRCCP_Final_Report_April_18_2014.pdf

¹⁸ Loudenback, Jeremy. (July 29, 2014). Transition Team Considers Powers of New Child Welfare Czar. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/transition-team-considers-powers-of-new-child-welfare-czar/7690>

¹⁹ Florida Dept. of Children and Families. (Jan. 2014). Department of Children and Families to Utilize Evidence-Based Risk Analysis to Protect Florida’s Most Vulnerable. *Press Release*: <http://www.myflfamilies.com/press-release/department-children-and-families-utilize-evidence-based-risk-analysis-protect-florida>



November 10, 2014

under age 5 who were “under the supervision of DCFS” should be given priority enrollment in Head Start, Early Head Start and Home Visitation programs.

On the prevention side, the BRC called on the Department of Public Health and First 5 LA to work together toward a comprehensive prevention plan.²⁰

III. General Health and Children’s Mental Health

The commission called for expanded mental health services for all children and youth involved with the child welfare system.

It also directed agencies providing mental health treatment to such children to reduce reliance on pharmacological interventions.

Lastly, it prioritized assessing and improving the performance of the county’s seven Medical Hubs, which provide initial assessments of children who are reported as suspected victims of child abuse or neglect and provide comprehensive health care to children in the foster care system.

IV. Workforce & Contracts

Los Angeles County’s child welfare system encompasses much more than the DCFS. Public health nurses, substance-abuse specialists, and a wide array of private providers work in varying degrees of cohesion to support the county’s child protection and child welfare needs. The BRC recommended that the county implement performance-based contracting, which would be based on measures of child well being determined by DCFS and other appropriate agencies.

DCFS social workers regularly deal with caseloads that are well above national standards in many cases, although the county has taken some steps over the past year to alleviate the pressure. Instead of directly calling on the Supervisors to hire more caseworkers, the commission recommended the board increase its oversight of DCFS’s strategic plan and ratchet up assessment of caseworker compliance on visiting standards and other measures.

V. Child Placement

California was the last state in the union to routinely pay foster caregivers more than kin caregivers who take in their family members. On June 20, 2014, California Gov. Jerry Brown created a \$30 million fund²¹ to help counties pay

²⁰ Renick, Christie. (Sept. 25, 2014) Movement on Child Maltreatment Prevention in Los Angeles. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/movement-on-child-maltreatment-prevention-in-los-angeles/8203>

²¹ Step Up Coalition. (June 20, 2014). CA Makes Historic Investment in Foster Children Raised by Relatives. *Step Up Website*: <http://stepupforkin.org/budgetsigned/>

November 10, 2014

these two critical caregiver groups the same amount of money as part of the 2014-2015 state budget.

The BRC recommended that Los Angeles County, with a Title IV-E Waiver that allows flexibility in funding, should equalize stipends to these families as soon as possible.

In addition, the BRC latched onto a proposal that died in the state legislature this year, which would have involved foster youth rating and assessing foster care placements.²²

VI. Law Enforcement

The BRC paid strong attention to the role law enforcement agencies play in protecting children. The commission called out the county's Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reports system, often referred to as E-SCARS,²³ and recommended that all appropriate agencies use the system to its full capacity as well as develop an early warning system for high-risk cases. The BRC also recommended additional mandatory training related to child abuse and E-SCARS for all officers.

²² Assemblymember Matt Dababneh Fact Sheet for AB 2583. (2014). California Youth Connection website: <http://calyouthconn.org/assets/files/AB%202583%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

²³ Renick, Christie. (Feb. 23, 2014). Los Angeles' Child Abuse Reporting System Underfunded & Underutilized. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-award-winning-child-abuse-reporting-system-underfunded-underutilized/5341>

I. Consolidation of Authority

Why it's important:

After reviewing hours of testimony from caregivers, social workers, public officials, and many others involved in Los Angeles County's child welfare system, the BRC recommended creating a new county office to oversee child safety. The BRC's final report highlighted that responsibility for the safety of children is scattered across many agencies at the county level:

No single entity is held accountable for what happens to at-risk children before, during, and after they are in the County's care. Previous attempts at reform have not been sufficient because no single entity is charged with integrating resources across departments for the benefit of children.

In approving the BRC's recommendations, the Board of Supervisors moved forward with plans to create an Office of Child Protection, with the hopes of increasing coordination, communication, and oversight of the many different child welfare-related agencies and entities in the county. Oversight includes creating a system to measure performance, actively holding various agencies accountable for results and making sure adequate resources are available to ensure the safety of children in Los Angeles County.

Even as the supervisors approved the new oversight body, Supervisor Don Knabe offered the lone dissenting voice,²⁴ saying that the new office would create "new layers of unnecessary bureaucracy" for agencies involved in the child welfare system.

The Office of Child Protection comes on the heels of other attempts at promoting oversight and coordination of different child-related county agencies. Los Angeles County CEO William T. Fujioka was tasked with a similar mandate to break down silos seven years ago, but the Board of Supervisors limited his powers after little progress had been made, according to an article by Garrett Therolf of the *Los Angeles Times*.²⁵

The county could also look to the state's Child Welfare Council, which has done a good job of convening the state's child welfare leaders but still lacks the authority to put far-ranging reforms into action. Other jurisdictions that have integrated services, such as Shasta County,²⁶ could be examined as well.

²⁴ Renick, Christie. (June 11, 2014). Los Angeles Moves on Sweeping Changes in Child Welfare Despite Supe's Vigorous Dissent. *The Chronicle of Social Change*. <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-moves-on-sweeping-changes-in-child-welfare-despite-supes-vigorous-dissent/7069>

²⁵ Therolf, Garret. (June 10, 2014). L.A. County supervisors vote to hire 'child protection czar'. The Los Angeles Times: <http://www.latimes.com/local/countygovernment/la-me-foster-reform-20140611-story.html>

²⁶ Heimpel, Daniel. (February 9, 2014). Not Your Average Czar. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/analysis/more-than-your-average-czar/5185>

To accomplish this historic change, the Board of Supervisors is pinning its hopes on finding an experienced leader who has a solid understanding of child welfare issues as well as experience leading change in “entrenched organizations.”²⁷

The Office of Child Protection will be helmed by a veritable child protection czar, charged with guiding structural reforms among county departments, identifying and influencing funding streams, and adopting strategic goals and plans for child safety across all county systems, according to a preliminary job description released by the Board of Supervisors.²⁸

What’s happened so far:

Since our first checkup in August, the county CEO’s office released the newly adopted strategic plan²⁹, and the transition team has charged ahead with efforts to lay the groundwork for the new Office of Child Protection (OCP).

The transition team has helped shepherd the process by working with executive search team m/Oppenheim and Associates to create a job description³⁰ for the OCP director position.³¹

At a presentation to the Board of Supervisors on October 7, the board voted 3-2³² to allow transition team co-chairs Leslie Gilbert-Lurie and Mitchell Katz to offer input in the selection of the OCP director.

Also at the October 7 transition team meeting, transition team co-chair Gilbert-Lurie expressed hope that a new director would be in place by the end of November. According to off-the-record conversations³³ with members of Los Angeles County’s child-welfare community, the process of interviewing an initial round of candidates has begun, though m/Oppenheim Associates has declined to comment on progress.

²⁷ Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. (July 8, 2014). Recruitment for Director of Office of Child Protection. Board Correspondence: <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/86911.pdf>

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ County of Los Angeles Strategic Plan:

<http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/Strategic%20Plan/2014%20County%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf>

³⁰ m/Oppenheim Associates. (September 1, 2014). Los Angeles County Director of Child Protection job description, accessed at: <http://www.moppenheim.com/wp-content/uploads/LA-County-Director-of-Child-Protection-position-description-final.pdf>

³¹ Transition team for the Office of Child Protection. (July 30, 2014). Report On The Progress Of The Newly Established Transition Team For The Office Of Child Protection. Accessed at: <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/87221.pdf>

³² Loudenback, Jeremy. (October 8, 2014). Los Angeles Supes Urged to Take Action on Maltreatment Prevention and Child Abuse Reporting System. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-supes-urged-to-take-action-on-maltreatment-prevention-child-abuse-reporting-system/8276>

³³ Loudenback, Jeremy. (Nov. 5, 2014) The Usual Suspects. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/the-usual-suspects/8508>

November 10, 2014

However, the transition team has moved forward with another key part of its mission: organizing, prioritizing and monitoring the implementation of the remaining Blue Ribbon Commission report recommendations.

According to transition team co-chair Gilbert-Lurie, such efforts are aimed at making sure that the incoming OCP director won't be starting at ground zero once he or she assumes the new position. "The transition team's role is to give the new director a running start when they take over," she said.³⁴

At an August 22 transition-team meeting, the committee prioritized reforms³⁵ related to law enforcement, relative caregivers and child maltreatment prevention. The Los Angeles County CEO's office produced the first version of a matrix that lists all Blue Ribbon Commission report recommendations, prioritizes them and includes notes about implementation progress. The October 7 version of the matrix of BRC recommendations is available online.³⁶

But the process to consolidate authority behind the new OCP has been uneven. The transition team has clashed with the Board of Supervisors over its role. At an August 19 presentation to the Board of Supervisors, Supervisors Zev Yaroslavsky and Don Knabe expressed critical views about the scope of the transition team's role.³⁷ According to a *Los Angeles Times* interview with Knabe,³⁸ transition team members "think they're set up to either handpick this person or run the department."

Another complication has been many delays apparently requested by Supervisor Don Knabe. The scheduled transition team presentation to the Board of Supervisors originally scheduled for August 5 was pushed back to August 19.³⁹ The September 2 presentation with the transition team was cancelled,⁴⁰ and the November transition team update was again delayed to November 12.⁴¹

³⁴ Heimpel, Daniel. (October 9, 2013) Reform Judge Michael Nash Seeks the New Child Protection Czar Job. *L.A. Weekly*: <http://www.laweekly.com/informer/2014/10/09/reform-judge-michael-nash-seeks-the-new-child-protection-czar-job>

³⁵ Renick, Christie. (August 25, 2014) Team Leading L.A. Child Protection Reform Defines Objectives. *The Chronicle of Social Change*:

³⁶ Transition team for the Office of Child Protection. (October 7, 2014). Status Update On The Implementation Of The Blue Ribbon Commission On Child Protection Recommendations. Accessed at: <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/87415.pdf>

³⁷ Loudenback, Jeremy. (August 19, 2014) In Los Angeles, Leaders Divided on How to Proceed with Child Welfare Reform. *The Chronicle of Social Change*:

³⁸ Sewell, Abby. (August 21, 2014). Some L.A. County officials frustrated by delays in child welfare czar search. *Los Angeles Times*: <http://www.latimes.com/local/countygovernment/la-me-child-welfare-20140820-story.html>

³⁹ Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. (August 5, 2014). Statement Of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles. Accessed at: http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/sop/cms1_217285.pdf

⁴⁰ Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. (September 2, 2014). Statement Of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles. Accessed at: http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/sop/cms1_218237.pdf

⁴¹ Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. (November 5, 2014). Statement Of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles. Accessed at: <http://bos.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=gC-kmUNuQf8%3d&portalid=1>

November 10, 2014

The pace of reform has also been slowed by the supervisors' preference to wait until an OCP director is in place before taking action on some recommendations. Thirteen of 33 recommendations, including creating a comprehensive service delivery system that would include a maltreatment prevention program and establishing measurable outcomes for the county's child welfare system, will wait until a new director starts the job.

That being said, the Board of Supervisors held its first closed door session to discuss candidates on November 5. Judge Michael Nash, presiding judge of Los Angeles County's Juvenile Court, is the first of a handful of potential candidates⁴² to throw his hat in the ring for the job.⁴³

What's next:

The transition team continues to press for updates about the status of the hiring process of the director of the OCP, but despite rumors about the interviewing of several candidates, the Board of Supervisors and m/Oppenheim Associates executive search firm have not provided any indication of progress in the hiring process.

However, the Board of Supervisors has suggested that it will have identified and hired the new director according to the transition team's recommended timeframe of November or December.

The transition team will continue to meet biweekly through at least the end of the year.

The October 2014 Status Update⁴⁴ from the county CEO's office includes these items:

- Develop a clear, multi-system data linkage and sharing plan to operate a single, coordinated system – All County Departmentss – 11/15/14
- Create Countywide confidentiality policy regarding sharing of information across depts. and agencies – All County Departments – Protocols have been drafted. Team needs to review and finalize the document for approval.

⁴² Loundenback, Jeremy. (Nov. 5, 2014). The Usual Suspects. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/the-usual-suspects/8508>

⁴³ Heimpel, Daniel. (October 9, 2013) Reform Judge Michael Nash Seeks the New Child Protection Czar Job. *L.A. Weekly*: <http://www.laweekly.com/informer/2014/10/09/reform-judge-michael-nash-seeks-the-new-child-protection-czar-job>

⁴⁴ Los Angeles County CEO's Office: October 2014 Status Update of BRCCP Recommendations. (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf

II. Maltreatment Prevention and Early Intervention

Why it's important:

In June, Yale University researcher Christopher Wildeman and colleagues, including the University of Southern California's Emily Putnam-Hornstein, published⁴⁵ results after sifting through 5.6 million child abuse records housed in the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

The findings were startling. By age 18, **one in eight** American children will have the experience of a social worker entering their home and determining that they were abused.

"Looking at the annual percentages, it's easy to say this is really tragic, but the implications on society are slight because the numbers are small," Wildeman said in an interview with *The Chronicle of Social Change* in June.⁴⁶ "But when 12.5 percent of kids are being maltreated, it is much harder to ignore."

This is consistent with findings yielded by data-linkage in California. In 2011, a research team headed by Putnam-Hornstein and Barbara Needell released a blockbuster study⁴⁷ that tracked the child welfare involvement of the more than two million children born in California between 1999 and 2002. By age 5, 5.2 percent of those children had a substantiation of abuse and neglect.

The clear implication is that the child maltreatment threat is bigger than leaders in the field had thought.

What's happened so far:

Judge Michael Nash, who has indicated that he is interested in leading the Office of Child Protection, was clear about what he thinks the mandate of the office would be.

"Dead children were the catalyst for this whole process, okay, so that needs to be the initial focus in my opinion," Nash said in an interview in October.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Wildeman, C., Emanuel, N., Leventhal, J.M., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Waldfogel, J., Lee, H., (Aug. 2014) . *JAMA Pediatrics*: <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1876686#Conclusions>

⁴⁶ Rinker, Brian. (June 4, 2014). New Study Finds 1 in 8 U.S. Children Maltreated. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/new-study-finds-1-in-8-u-s-children-maltreated/6884>

⁴⁷ Putnam-Hornstein, E., Webster, D., Needell, B., Magruder, J. (2011) A Public Health Approach to Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Evidence from a Data Linkage Project in the United States. *Child Abuse Review*: http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/about/cap/cap-conferences/pp-workshop/pp-materials/3_-public-health-approach_putnam_hornstein.pdf

⁴⁸ Heimpel, Daniel. (October 9, 2013) Reform Judge Michael Nash Seeks the New Child Protection Czar Job. *L.A. Weekly*.

November 10, 2014

To fight this, the county has been increasingly talking about applying predictive analytics⁴⁹ to both child maltreatment prevention and also maltreatment intervention once a call of abuse comes into the county's 24-hour hotline. Judge Margaret Henry, who sits on the transition team, referenced it in the October 27 transition team meeting.

Predictive analytics, or predictive risk modeling, crunches data to yield a probability that an event will occur.

The BRC called for the immediate implementation of a predictive risk modeling tool that was developed in Florida.⁵⁰ That tool identified a number of child deaths and looked back to see what factors were present when those cases came to the attention of the department. By looking at those risk factors, child protection workers are alerted to possibly heightened safety risks and can plan accordingly.

While the BRC discussed the Florida model, Los Angeles County's DCFS was developing a similar tool of its own. Dubbed AURA, or Approach to Understanding Risk Assessment, this program looked at serious incidents - including child death - over a three-year period to determine a risk score.

But both of these tools are not truly preventative.

"Instead of predictive analytics, let's do preventive analytics," said DCFS Spokesman Armand Montiel in an interview.⁵¹ "DCFS is not the proper agency for social engineering. The school system, mental health, public health, probation, law enforcement, they all see these families before we do."

This is an area where Putnam-Hornstein's research, which links birth data to subsequent involvement in public systems including child protection, can be so powerful.

In her 2011 study and subsequent work, Putnam-Hornstein and her colleagues found that by age five, certain at-birth risk factors were linked to heightened rates of reported or substantiated abuse. These included:

- Children born without fathers listed on their birth certificates
- Mothers on public health insurance
- Mothers who had not completed high school
- Teen mothers

⁴⁹ Heimpel, Daniel (Oct. 27, 2014). Preventive Analytics. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/preventive-analytics/8384>

⁵⁰ Kelly, John. (Sept. 17, 2014). Los Angeles Eyes Florida's Child Fatality Prevention System. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-eyes-floridas-child-fatality-prevention-system/8132>

⁵¹ Heimpel, Daniel (Oct. 27, 2014). Preventive Analytics. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/preventive-analytics/8384>

November 10, 2014

Subsequent analysis revealed that the cumulative effect of having more than one of these risk factors increased the likelihood of CPS involvement even further.

“In the context of child protection, it [predictive analytics] can be applied as a tool for risk stratifying or risk classifying cases – and this information can be used for a range of activities – as a ‘check’ for clinical decision-making, to assign more experienced workers to more serious cases, to prioritize families for limited services slots, or to take some other action,” Putnam-Hornstein said in an interview.⁵²

The question remains as to whether or not predictive analytics will be a part of the comprehensive prevention plan being developed by two large Los Angeles agencies.

Early in October, the transition team heard a presentation from First 5 LA and the Department of Public Health on what the two agencies currently do toward maltreatment prevention. During that meeting, the agencies were tasked to move forward in convening a workgroup whose function is to create a countywide maltreatment prevention strategy. The workgroup was scheduled to convene for the first time on October 24, and transition team member Patricia Curry was named as the team’s representative in the workgroup.

Then, on October 27, the Los Angeles County CEO’s office delivered a report⁵³ to the transition team that outlined a plan to pair public health nurses with social workers for home visits for children up to 24 months of age. The report also included a draft of an assessment tool public health nurses would use during home visits.

What’s next:

DCFS is considering whether or not to use the AURA tool. During the October 27 transition team meeting, DCFS Director Philip Browning said the department could start rolling out the tool by the end of November.

First 5 LA and the Department of Public Health will report back to the transition team on the development of a comprehensive plan.

The CEO’s office will continue to develop a pilot for pairing public health nurses with social workers, but no specific time frame has been suggested for implementation.

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Los Angeles County: Health Services for Children in the Child Protection System: https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_PHN_10.27.14.pdf

III. General Health and Mental Health

Why it's important:

“General and mental health” refers to services related to the physical and psychological well-being of children. Medical issues or developmental problems may often be important signs of child abuse and neglect. Without better medical care or examination, children in Los Angeles County may be at risk of further maltreatment, injury or other tragic outcomes.

A major part of the county's strategy to improve health care and examinations to children in foster care are its seven Medical Hub clinics. Children reported to DCFS go through a “minimally invasive screening process” at these hubs. Medical Hubs are part of a program that offers comprehensive medical and mental health screenings and forensic evaluations for both children in foster care and those at risk of detention. The Medical Hubs concept was created as a collaboration among DCFS, the Department of Mental Health and Department of Health Services. However, insufficient resources have prevented wider use of the hubs across the county.

What's happened so far:

Since August 2014, the transition team has made some headway in this area.

In the October 7 Board of Supervisors' meeting, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas urged his colleagues and the transition team to take action on the recommendations related to Medical Hubs:

“One of the tangible deliverables that we should hone in on with some immediacy is that of the medical hub,” he said. “We have best practices, promising practices, for the LAC-USC Medical Center, but could we get a system-wide, county-wide network with the best practices on full display with respect to the medical hub concept? That was one of the major insights that came out of the findings of the Blue Ribbon Commission.”⁵⁴

Dr. Astrid Heger, executive director of the Violence Intervention Program at Los Angeles County-U.S.C. Medical Center and professor of clinical pediatrics at the University of Southern California recently conducted an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the county's seven medical hubs. Dr. Heger reported back to the transition team on October 27 about the medical hubs, and she stated that she had already seen positive change just in the time she spent on the assessment.

⁵⁴ Loudenback, Jeremy, Los Angeles Supes Urged to Take Action on Maltreatment Prevention and Child Abuse Reporting System (October 8, 2014). Retrieved from <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-supes-urged-to-take-action-on-maltreatment-prevention-child-abuse-reporting-system/8276>

Following is a brief overview of Heger's findings:

- VIP-L.A.C.-U.S.C. Medical Center: Needs additional professional staff to provide walk-in screenings and forensics for DCFS and shorten wait times.
- East San Gabriel Valley: Needs additional administrative and medical staff.
- High Desert Ambulatory Health Center: Needs medical leadership; needs forensic professionals available each day; needs additional medical staff; and needs access to onsite mental health services and improved access to ongoing mental health services for foster families.
- Olive View-U.C.L.A. Medical Center: Needs additional space and dedicated staff (current staff are split between assignments, and no staff are dedicated to walk-in coverage) and needs onsite mental health services.
- Harbor-U.C.L.A. Medical Center: Needs additional space/exam rooms; needs space for mental health services; and needs to extend service hours to 8 p.m.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Medical Center: Needs additional medical staff; needs organizational chart and leadership; space needs upgrades; needs a special clinic to serve sexually exploited youth; needs onsite mental health services; and needs to extend service hours to 8 p.m.

In the October 2014 Status Update matrix⁵⁵ created by the county CEO's office, individuals have been named as responsible parties for a number of the health and mental health recommendations, and in some cases timelines have been specified:

- Develop and implement a mandate that non-pharmacological interventions are best practice -- Dr. Christopher Thompson: 6/30/15
- Incorporate trauma-focused assessments and treatments and vulnerability to self-harming behaviors for teens and transitioning youth -- Terri Boykins: 6/30/15
- Provide access to the age-appropriate mental health services for children age 5 and under in child welfare -- Dr. Sam Chan: 6/30/15

What's next:

The transition team is expected to explore increasing funding for the Medical Hubs as well as prioritize the role of public health nurses in the investigative process. No timeline has been made public at this point.

⁵⁵ Los Angeles County Health Services for Children in the Child Protection System (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf



IV. Workforce & Contracts

Why it's important:

In December 2013, Los Angeles County social workers went on strike⁵⁶ to protest high caseloads and fight for the hiring of more social workers.⁵⁷ The first strike in more than 10 years by social workers exposed the difficult conditions faced by DCFS caseworkers.

Frequently overwhelmed with heavy caseloads well above the federal and state recommended limits,⁵⁸ caseworkers are often prevented from offering quality service to children in the child welfare system. In Los Angeles County, social workers often contend with caseloads of more than 30 per month; national guidelines suggest that a normal caseload is 12 active cases a month.^{59,60} And lawyers for children in the county's Juvenile Dependency Court are also burdened by dramatically oversized caseloads that impact their ability to offer sufficient services to their clients.⁶¹

The 2012 Recurring Systemic Issues Report⁶² that describes 15 serious incidents, including 14 child deaths, as well as feedback provided to the BRC by a variety of stakeholders in the community, demonstrated that social workers and other front-end caseworkers in the system are in need of further training. In particular, the BRC's report suggested specific training be given to social workers working with children aged 0 to 5. The report also referenced opportunities for continued learning for DCFS social workers and administrators.

The creation and implementation of a wider set of outcome measures and benchmarks that would reflect the performance of caseworkers is also being encouraged. For example, the county could consider tracking the frequency of missed meetings among its social workers.

⁵⁶ Heimpel, Daniel. (Sept. 23, 2013). Los Angeles Social Workers Plan Walkout. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/los-angeles-social-workers-plan-walkout/4010>

⁵⁷ Mehta, Seema & Sewell, Abby. (December 5, 2013). County social workers strike over pay, high caseloads. *Los Angeles Times*: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-social-worker-strike-20131205-story.html>

⁵⁸ Loudenback, Jeremy. (June 24, 2014). LA County Approves Funding To Hire More Social Workers. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/la-county-approves-funding-to-hire-more-social-workers/7299>

⁵⁹ Child Welfare League of America. Guidelines for Computing Caseload Standards: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/standards/caseloadstandards.htm>

⁶⁰ American Humane Association. (2000). SB 2030 Child Welfare Services Workload Study Final Report: <http://www.cwda.org/downloads/publications/cws/SB2030Study.pdf>

⁶¹ Loudenback, Jeremy. (June 18, 2014). California Rejects Bid to Restore Funding for Child Welfare Courts. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/la-county-approves-funding-to-hire-more-social-workers/7299>

⁶² Shek Naamani, A. (April 16, 2012) Report Regarding DCFS Recurring Systemic Issues, Children's Special Investigative Unit, Board of Supervisors, County of Los Angeles



What's happened so far:

On September 29, 2014, California Governor Jerry Brown approved Assembly Bill 1978,⁶³ which "gives social workers a venue to expose problems in the child welfare system without risking their jobs and allowing everyone to put our most vulnerable neglected children first." While apparently toothless, the bill encourages social workers to report any time they believe policy, practice or procedures are endangering a child, and also protects those workers when they report these concerns. As of January 1, 2018, it also requires the State Department of Social Services to report to the legislature and the public the number of disclosures it has received and a summary of the issues raised as well as actions taken in response.⁶⁴

Also, the county CEO's office released an October 2014 Status Report⁶⁵ that includes action items under the categories of "Transparency & Relationship with Providers & the Community" and "Training and Workforce Development" along with timelines, point persons, and in some cases estimated costs.

What's next:

The October 2014 Status Report lists the following under "Transparency & Relationship with Providers & the Community:"

- Adopt outcome measures for performance-based contracting -- Eric Marts: 6/30/15

And under "Training and Workforce Development":

- Conduct cross-training with DCFS employees to improve collaboration (include DMH, DHS, DPH, Dependency Court, Probation) -- Madeline Roachell: 6/30/15 (Estimated cost: \$12 million)
- Train personnel (in-house and contract agencies) on how to most effectively work with age 0-5 population and their families/caretakers -- Madeline Roachell: 3/31/15
- University Center for the Child and the Family (UCCF) will submit an annual report on outcomes aligned with County's vision -- Madeline Roachell: 6/30/15
- Create innovative training for social workers & supervisors; include audit to address workload -- Patricia Willems-Dennis: 3/31/15

⁶³ Jones-Sawyer (Sept. 29, 2014) Assembly Bill No. 1978. *California Legislative Information*: http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1978

⁶⁴ http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1978

⁶⁵ Los Angeles County CEO's Office: October 2014 Status Update of BRCCP Recommendations. (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf

V. Child Placement

Why it's important:

Social workers frequently struggle to find adequate placements for children, spending hours making phone calls or otherwise looking for beds.⁶⁶

According to the BRC's report, as of March 2014, the number of children in out-of-home placement was 20,676, an increase of 1,257 from the previous year. The most recent available statistics indicate that there are 3,000 private foster family agency (FFA) homes with 7,013 beds and 584 DCFS-recruited homes with 1,753 beds.

The distinction between private FFA homes and county-administered homes is an important one. Many in the child welfare community have questioned the efficacy of having a foster family placement system that uses both private and public providers.

In December 2013, *The Los Angeles Times* attempted to shed light on this issue in an extended feature story.⁶⁷ While the story did show some significant discrepancies in services offered at private and public homes, many in the child welfare community, particularly researchers, questioned the rigor of the *Times'* analysis of instances of abuse.

In short, there are too few beds, and too few quality beds. Further, the process of locating those beds is encumbered by a bifurcated public/private system that has grown more organically than intentionally.

What's happened so far:

In August 2014, the Department of Children and Family Services began implementing enhancements to its Foster Care Search System, including rolling out a mobile app to "help speed up placements and increase the stability of the system."⁶⁸

On September 29, 2014, California Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 1761,⁶⁹ which allows social workers to "place children who have been removed from the custody of their parents in the homes of relatives or non-relative extended family members after a detention hearing and pending the dispositional hearing."

⁶⁶ Ling, L., Bucher, A., Terp, L., Heimpel, D. (July 3, 2014). Children of the System. Our America with Lisa Ling, *The Oprah Winfrey Network*: <http://www.oprah.com/own-our-america-lisa-ling/Children-of-the-System>

⁶⁷ Therolf, Garrett. (Dec. 18, 2013). Private foster care system, intended to save children, endangers some. *The Los Angeles Times*: <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-foster-care-dto-htmistory.html#ixzz2nprIV8iw>

⁶⁸ Los Angeles County CEO's Office: October 2014 Status Update of BRCCP Recommendations. (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf

⁶⁹ Assembly Bill No. 1761 (Sept. 29, 2014). *California Legislative Information*: http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1761

November 10, 2014

According to Children’s Law Center of California, the firm that represents children in foster care in Los Angeles and Sacramento Counties and one of the bill’s sponsors, “AB 1761 clarifies current law regarding the temporary placement of a foster child with a relative or relatives up until the dependency dispositional hearing. Recently, some hearing officers have interpreted the law as only allowing preferential placement with relatives through the detention hearing; this bill will resolve the issue and make it clear that youth may be placed with relatives through the dispositional phase of the dependency process.”⁷⁰

On October 1, Los Angeles County submitted a “non-binding letter of intent” to participate in the Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program to the State of California. Counties are waiting for clarification from the state on how caregiver payments will be calculated, and how the funding stream may intersect with federal requirements under Title IV-E.⁷¹

In terms of better understanding the quality of recruitment in private foster care as compared to public foster care, the Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation made a grant⁷² to U.C.L.A. researcher Todd Franke to conduct an independent analysis.

Lastly, the October 2014 status report⁷³ from the county CEO’s office identified timelines and point persons for seven action items related to child placement, three of which may be completed by the end of 2014.

What’s next:

The State of California is to report back to counties specifically how the new relative caregiver funding will be calculated, at which point counties will be required to opt in or out of the program. In an email to *The Chronicle of Social Change* on November 3, Michael Weston of the state’s Department of Social Services reported that “the instructions to counties are currently in the review process. They are expected to be finalized and released in the coming weeks. We still anticipate a January 1, 2015 implementation.”

The October 2014 Status Report from the county CEO’s office includes the following:

⁷⁰ <http://www.clcla.org/sponsorlegislation>

⁷¹ Loudenback, Jeremy (September 4, 2014). L.A. County Weighs Accessing New Money for Relative Caregivers. *The Chronicle of Social Change*. Retrieved from <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/l-a-county-weighs-accessing-new-money-for-relative-caregivers/8036>

⁷² Transition Team for the Office of Child Protection. (Oct. 7, 2014). Status Update on the Implementation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection Recommendations: <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/87415.pdf>

⁷³ Los Angeles County CEO’s Office: October 2014 Status Update of BRCCP Recommendations. (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf



November 10, 2014

- Examine ability to waive federal eligibility rules to support children in out of home care -- Cynthia McCoy Miller: 12/31/14
- Utilize Title IV-E waiver for children placed with kin and in foster family settings -- Cynthia McCoy Miller: 12/31/14
- Ensure relative caregivers are more fully supported to address a range of needs (i.e. resource center) -- Rhelda Shabazz: 3/31/15 (Estimated cost: \$1 million)
- Determine a more streamlined county licensing system for foster homes and supports for relatives -- Rhelda Shabazz: 3/31/15
- Conduct an independent analysis of non-relative foster family recruitment efforts -- Rhelda Shabazz: 3/31/15 (funded by the Pritzker Foundation)
- Develop a computerized, real-time system to identify available and appropriate placements based on the specific needs of the child -- Cecilia Custodio (department-wide implementation is currently ongoing)
- Involve foster youth in rating and assessment of foster homes -- Rhelda Shabazz: 12/31/14

VI. Law Enforcement

Why it's important:

Although DCFS is typically thought of as the first responder to reports of child abuse, law enforcement plays a substantial role. In 2013, Los Angeles County's 46 law enforcement agencies received 52,109 reports of child maltreatment from DCFS and sent officers to investigate on nearly 80 percent of cases, according to data from the Office of the Los Angeles County District Attorney obtained by *The Chronicle of Social Change*.⁷⁴

However, within those figures, there remains a high degree of inconsistency in response by law enforcement agencies across the county. For the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 97 percent of child maltreatment cases were investigated. For other law enforcement agencies in Inglewood, Long Beach and La Verne, rates of in-person investigation were far lower, exposing wide variations in the way child abuse and neglect is addressed across the county.

"What we need is a change in philosophy," said Tom Sirkel, who retired as operations and training lieutenant of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Special Victims Bureau after 39 years in the organization. "Law enforcement agencies shouldn't get to choose which cases they go out to. Like the Sheriff's Department, they need to roll out to every call."⁷⁵

Sirkel and others have suggested that the way in which allegations of child maltreatment are investigated should be rethought. Currently, some law-enforcement departments only give allegations immediate attention and an in-person visit when the allegations are perceived to have risen to the level of a crime.

What's happened so far:

District Attorney (DA) Jackie Lacey requested additional funds to support the DA's E-SCARS (Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System) Unit earlier this year; funds were also requested to be used for system maintenance and upgrades through the Department of Children & Family Services. The Board of Supervisors reviewed the request during the summer months but required that the transition team in charge of overseeing implementation of the BRC's recommendations submit a letter prioritizing all recommendations before the board would be willing to release any funds.

⁷⁴ Heimpel, Daniel. (May 8, 2014). New "Explosive" Figures on Law Enforcement Response to Child Abuse in LA County. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/analysis/rolling-the-dice-on-child-abuse-in-long-beach-la-county/6517>

⁷⁵ Loudonback, Jeremy. (July 15, 2014). Long Beach Backs Child Abuse Investigation Policies. *The Chronicle of Social Change*: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news/long-beach-backs-child-abuse-investigation-policies/7503>

November 10, 2014

The transition team submitted a letter⁷⁶ to the board requesting the release of the funds the week of October 27, 2014. The letter included the following recommendations:

1. Approve the release of the \$467,000 to the District Attorney for the four requested positions related to E-SCARS;
2. Approve the release of \$764,000 to the Department of Children and Family Services for system enhancements and ongoing E-SCARS support and maintenance; and
3. Direct the CEO to work with the respective departments to effectuate the release of those funds.

The Board of Supervisors approved the request to release funding for E-SCARS on November 5, 2014.

What's next:

The October 2014 Status Report⁷⁷ from the county CEO's office includes the following:

- All Sheriff's [sic] and local law enforcement agencies must cross report every child abuse allegation to DCFS -- Joseph Esposito: TBD
- Training of all levels of law enforcement officers must be enhanced to include sufficient initial and recurrent training on child abuse and E-SCARS -- Joseph Esposito: TBD

⁷⁶ <http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/89407.pdf>

⁷⁷ Los Angeles County CEO's Office: October 2014 Status Update of BRCCP Recommendations. (October 27, 2014). https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TT_CEO_Status_Report_10.27.14.pdf

Conclusion

The purpose of this quarterly checkup is to assess the health of the child protection reform effort in Los Angeles County.

In the 207 days since the Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection issued its final report, county leaders have given weight to the work conducted by the BRC by voting to implement the commission's recommendations and by creating a transition team to help implement its ideas.

The transition team, DCFS and the Board of Supervisors have since made strides in moving an enormous county administration to see some of those reforms stick.

Most notably by:

- Releasing new funding to support law enforcement's efforts to reduce child abuse.
- Completing a predictive risk modeling tool: AURA.
- Creating a process and interviewing candidates for the newly created Office of Child Protection.
- Assessing what the Medical Hubs need in order to be able to better serve vulnerable children.

Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services fields more than 150,000 allegations of child abuse a year, oversees the cases of 30,000 families whose children have been victims of substantiated abuse and takes care of 15,000 children who have been removed from their biological parents. It is the largest child welfare system in the world.

While the process to tackle such a complex public policy challenge is daunting, the county has stayed the course.

As the process rolls forward into new territory with the creation of the Office of Child Protection, we at FMC hope that those outside of the county administration will help it maintain the county's focus on the continued challenge ahead.

The third quarterly checkup will be issued in February 2015. We welcome feedback and ideas about where we should direct our attention for the next edition.

We can be reached at info@fosteringmediaconnections.org or 415-416-6187.