

**Mariposa County
Department of
Human Services**

Today's Challenges -

Tomorrow's Outcomes

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Preface

In September 2008 the Central California Social Welfare Evaluation, Research and Training Center (SWERT), was asked to conduct a review of the Mariposa County Department of Human Services (DHS) and formulate recommendations for a strategic plan for systemic redesign. The SWERT Center is an ancillary unit of California State University, Fresno under the auspices of the College of Health and Human Services, Department of Social Work Education. Based on SWERT's experience with training and program evaluation in the fields of child welfare, adult protective services, behavioral health, and other human services, Mr. Jim Rydingsword, Director of Mariposa County DHS, requested an assessment of the Department's role in the community and its readiness for purposeful evolution toward a family-focused service delivery system. The Project was initiated in December 2008; the review process involved many hours with the community organizations and interested individuals, service recipients, and employees.

As reviewers, we were impressed with the complexities inherent in efforts to establish public/private partnerships that support the delivery of effective, integrated human services. Likewise, we were consistently aware of the interest and support expressed by many of those who participated, whether from the community, from the department, or from clients. It is our hope that this report will be used to advance the Department's goal of embarking on systemic change and working with the community to improve the area's capacity to deliver a comprehensive array of human services in an ever-changing environment.

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Introduction

This strategic review project to study Mariposa County's human services delivery systems was initiated by Mr. Jim Rydingsword in an effort to develop a better understanding of the ways in which the Department of Human Services (DHS) fulfills its role in the community. The over-arching goal was to develop a knowledge-based framework within which DHS management and staff and community partners could work together to move toward an integrated, family-focused approach to human services. It would include assessment of strategic changes and innovations that could support the effective blending of public and private resources to better serve Mariposa County residents.

Initial meetings between the DHS executive staff and the SWERT review team established the scope and expectations of the Project. Mr. Rydingsword clearly articulated the challenges and opportunities presented by the need to achieve the most positive outcomes for Mariposa County families and communities. Public/private partnerships, effective utilization of DHS staff and resources, and generation of new local, state and federal resources were key issues to be considered. Specific components to be addressed included:

- External and internal perceptions about the Department's role in the community and the effectiveness of the ways in which it fulfills that role;
- Assessment of the services offered by the Department compared to the services desired by the community.
- Community, client, and employee perceptions about the scope, content, and effectiveness of existing service delivery systems.
- Opportunities to use new and/or existing resources to improve or expand current services.
- Review of existing formal and informal relationships between DHS and the community, and new and innovative partnerships that could enhance the quality and quantity of human services available to Mariposa County residents.

Public and employee perspectives were viewed as critical components of the study. The SWERT team's role was to establish an environment that welcomed input about the current DHS structure and functions as well as opportunities for future directions. The final product of the study was to be a multi-layered report of findings,

conclusions, and recommendations that would assist DHS and the community in effecting and supporting system change over time.

Mariposa County

Mariposa County, on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, has an area of approximately 931,200 acres, nearly half of which are publicly owned forest land. The region is primarily mountainous, with a few unincorporated communities located in isolated areas some distance from the town of Mariposa. Tourism is a prominent industry and is the area's largest employer. In 2000¹, the county's population was estimated at 17,130; by 2007 it was estimated at 18,200, and is expected to grow to 21,700 by 2020.

The 2000 census indicated that the county's population was comprised almost equally of males (51%) and females (49%). Persons aged 18 to 64 years made up 61.2% of the county's residents, while 21.6% were children less than 18 years and 17.2% were age 65 or older. Although the census indicated the majority of residents were Caucasian, Hispanic (7.8%) and Native American (3.5%) comprised the next largest ethnic groups. English was the primary language for 95% of the population.

From 2002 through 2006, construction and government led the county's industry employment². Other services and educational and health services also increased, although professional and business services decreased along with trade, transportation, and utilities. During that period the unemployment rate ranged from 6.7% to 5.6%, consistent with state trends. However, although the median annual income in 2000 was \$32,646, 20.8% of the county's residents had an average income of less than \$15,000. The largest percentage of households, 23.5%, had an average income of \$15,000 to \$30,000, followed by 21.9% between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

Poverty was a factor in the lives of many of the county's children and the elderly; 16.4% of families with children less than 18 years and 9% of individuals age 65 or older lived below federal poverty levels. Public assistance and State Supplemental Income provided support to 22.7% of the county's families.

Given the dramatic shift in state and national economic trends since 2006, it is reasonable to expect similar downward shifts in Mariposa County's major industries and consequent increases in the community's need for public services.

¹ The U.S. Census Bureau (no current estimates or Projections are available for Mariposa County)

The Department of Human Services

Under the direction of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, the DHS provides a full range of social, behavioral, and economic support services. The Department's client services are organized into three divisions – Social Services, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, and Employment and Community Services. Each division is headed by a Deputy Director and supported by the Administrative Services division, which includes the DHS Director, the Fiscal Officer, administrative and secretarial support, and services such as budget development and management, information technology, and statistical services.

Each division has a primary service focus; however, many clients receive services from more than one division, often simultaneously. A brief description of services provided by the various units in each division is shown below.

Social Services

Adult Protective Services – Prevention and remediation of abuse and/or neglect of those unable to protect their own interests.

Child Welfare Services – Protection of the safety and well being of children and support of family stability.

Foster Family Home Licensing – Recruitment and licensing individuals and families who are interested in becoming foster family homes, and support and recognition services to licensed foster parents.

In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) – Services to Medi-Cal eligible individuals who are over 65, blind, or disabled, in order to keep these individuals safely in their own homes and prevent placement in skilled nursing or board and care facilities.

Public Authority – Assistance to IHSS recipients with locating and hiring an in-home care provider.

Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Mental Health Services – Assessment, treatment, and recovery services for youth, adults, and older adults, including peer support and social rehabilitation and wellness and recovery programs at the R.O.A.D. House Community Drop-In Center.

Alcohol and Other Drug Services – individual and group support for prevention and abstinence of alcohol and other drugs. The Heritage House Community Drop-In

² Employment Development Department, State of California

Center holds 12 step informational meetings and a wide range of both mental health services and drug and alcohol services.

MiWu-Mati Healing Center – Under a contract with the Department, the Mariposa Indian Council provides client-centered services to Native American clients, integrating professional clinical counseling services with traditional Native American values and practices.

Friendly Visitor Program for Seniors – prevent older adult isolation by matching seniors with volunteers who want to help.

Employment and Community Services

Welfare to Work – Training, education, work experience, counseling and employment services for eligible adults.

General Assistance Advocacy Program – advocacy for disabled individuals, including applications and appeals to Social Security.

Independent Living Program – comprehensive services to current and former foster care youth transitioning to independent living.

Family Reunification – support for eligible families to reunify with children placed in out-of-home care.

Eligibility – CalWORKs, assistance to needy families, Medi-Cal and County Medical Services Program, Food Stamps, General Assistance, and Foster Care and Adoptions payments.

Community Services Block Grant – services to assist low-income people in attaining self-sufficiency. Includes linkage to immediate life necessities such as food, shelter, and health care. In addition, community services aid in poverty reduction and increased capacity for achieving results and increasing community resources.

Community Development Block Grants – provides funding for housing activities, public works, community facilities, and public service projects serving lower-income people.

Community Action Programs – includes energy assistance to offset fuel costs and emergency assistance with energy bills for eligible low-income households, and home weatherization assistance.

Housing Authority – administration of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Rental Assistance program to help pay rent for low-income households.

With 114.6 budgeted staff positions, DHS provides services to meet the needs of children, youth, adults, and older adults throughout the county. The services sites are located in six different facilities in the town of Mariposa; some services are provided on a weekly basis at Coulterville, Greeley Hill, and Yosemite.

Project Structure and Methodology

One of the Department's goals in the review process was to assess its strengths and needs, both externally in its relationship to the community and clients, and internally as perceived by staff. In order to establish a context and assist with understanding the current status of human services in Mariposa County, the SWERT team first reviewed existing departmental and community programs, policies, and strategic planning documents. The next step was to determine how best to meet the Project goals.

Because the understanding and support of community and DHS staff were critical to achievement of long-range goals for improving human services, the first Project objective was to solicit community and employee perspectives about the ways in which the Department does or does not meet expectations about its functions and services. Based on research regarding the gathering of qualitative data, a questionnaire format was selected as the most likely to be successful in soliciting opinions and perceptions. Several factors were considered in developing the target audience groups, the questionnaires, and the delivery context.

- Who were the target participants?
- How and where would the desired information be gathered?
- What differences, if any, would be needed in designing questionnaires for specific groups?

Discussions with DHS executive staff resulted in identification of groups and individuals from whom input would be solicited and the most effective ways to reach those participants. In attempting to gather sufficient data to support meaningful recommendations, the team chose to collect data through interviews with community agencies and individuals, DHS clients, DHS employees, foster parents, and foster youth.

Outreach and marketing activities were developed separately for each group to maximize opportunities for participation and help assure adequate representation. Methods utilized to identify potential participants are described below.

- 1) Community agencies and individuals with knowledge about or interactions with DHS were encouraged to participate in public meetings or one-to-one interviews. Groups and individuals were selected through conversations with DHS executive staff, input from community agencies, and the review team's recommendations for including participants with knowledge about the issues to be addressed. The DHS administrative support staff identified locations, dates, and times for public meetings and issued invitations to other County departments and community-based organizations. All group meetings were facilitated by one or two review team members or by trained volunteers in outlying communities, with no DHS staff present. A representative listing of participant agencies and organizations is included in Attachment B.
- 2) Input from DHS clients was solicited using a system of voluntary, confidential self-report. Since there wouldn't be scheduled, facilitated discussions specific to this group, questionnaires were based on a numeric scale format for participants to rank their responses to each question. Each of the three DHS divisions made questionnaires available at service delivery sites and provided stamped envelopes addressed directly to the SWERT review team. Clients were assured of safety and security and that responses would have no effect on current or future services.
- 3) DHS employees at every level were interviewed. Individual interviews were conducted with the Director, each of the Deputy Directors, and the Fiscal Officer. A single group interview was scheduled for all supervisory staff, and multiple interview times and locations were made available for line-level employees from all divisions. The Deputy Directors assured that employees under their supervision were advised of the Project purpose and process and assigned to a specific focus group time slot. Several employees who were unable to attend a scheduled meeting submitted written responses to the questionnaires.
- 4) Participation from foster parents and youth in foster care was solicited in separate facilitated group discussions. As previously described, questionnaires were modified to include questions specific to child welfare services for each

group. Invitations were issued to foster parents to participate in a scheduled group interview, and foster youth were interviewed during their participation in the Independent Living Program.

Questionnaire designs were based on the anticipated group compositions and the context in which information would be gathered from each group. Questionnaires used for each group are included in Attachment A.

- The first set of questions in all questionnaires solicited general information from each group about the participants' knowledge and expectations about DHS functions and its role in the community.
- The second section of each questionnaire was specific to the participants' personal experiences and interactions with and within the department.

The Project's time period also allowed an opportunity to utilize the community data-gathering interviews to support Mariposa County's Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) process for Child Welfare Services, held in April 2009. Focus groups were held with both foster parents and with foster youth in an attempt to solicit input about DHS as a whole as well as Mariposa County Child Welfare Services focus area of placement stability for foster youth. Questionnaires for these two groups included several additional questions specific to placement stability of foster youth.

In all one-to-one interviews and in group meetings, facilitators used the appropriate questionnaires as the basis for discussion. Group attendees were also encouraged to use questionnaires to write and submit comments they did not wish to make verbally.

The second objective was to aggregate, analyze, and utilize the information as the knowledge base for a strategic planning process. A total of 231 individuals participated, comprised of 64 community representatives, 57 clients, 93 DHS employees (85% of the 109 positions filled at the time of the review process), 12 Foster Youth (5 Mariposa County youth and 7 from other counties), and 5 Foster Parents.

Responses from all questionnaires, including respondent comments and facilitator notes, were entered into a database to allow for sorting, quantitative analysis, and qualitative review and analysis. Client questionnaires were first tabulated based on numeric ratings for each question, then added to the database along with qualitative comments.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Common across all groups and individuals who participated in the process was the perception that the Department of Human Services is in a state of constant change, driven by the need to be responsive to the evolving needs of community residents. A virtually unanimous perception is that the appointment of Jim Rydingsword as the Director has already begun to bring about a more positive influence on the department and the community. The majority of the respondents voiced optimism and positive expectations about his ability to lead the department and the community toward improved efficiency and effectiveness of human services.

Many department and community strengths were highlighted during the review process as assets that can provide a sound foundation for the future. Recognizing existing resources, both human and fiscal, and capitalizing on windows of opportunity will provide support for the department's vision and mission to be advanced. Shared leadership from the department and the community will result in maximum benefit to County residents.

Generally speaking, the responses to all questions from all respondents address five broad categories:

- **Change Management:** a systematic process for organizing and managing change that is needs-based, flexible, responsible, and accountable.
- **Department/community relationships:** the effectiveness of interactions between DHS and other agencies and individuals, including other County departments.
- **DHS Communications:** employee input regarding the structure and effectiveness of internal communication systems.
- **Staff and Leadership Development:** orientation, training, and ongoing support for employees' professional growth and development.
- **Service Delivery:** Awareness, access, timeliness, and effectiveness of the DHS service delivery systems.

The sections below summarize the five most frequently cited observations, strengths, challenges, and recommendations identified by participants in each cross-cutting category.

Change Management

Overall, community and employee responses indicate positive reactions to the department's efforts to move toward systemic change and improved community outcomes. While change was sometimes viewed as simply being "better than before," the majority of the participants that addressed this theme recognized that the direction is an entirely different approach to human services. Examples of responses include:

- Instead of having to "go around" rules, the new direction is to make mandates more community friendly.
- New levels of interagency cooperation are supporting change and accountability.
- Long-standing practices that prevented change are being addressed at some levels.
- Improved relationships in the community and in the department help to plan and manage change.

Managing change, particularly across a department and within a community, brings unique challenges and opportunities. The most common responses shared by participants were:

- Community partners and employees need to be part of change planning so they understand the reasons and have ownership.
- The majority of employees did not express resistance to new processes, but they need to understand the meaning and impact of new concepts, such as "family-focused services."
- Changes need to be well thought out so there don't have to be too many "fixes."
- Care needs to be taken to not make so many changes at once that community partners and staff get overloaded and the effects of change are hard to evaluate.
- Some changes could be made more quickly than others – need to understand the differences.
- When changes are implemented, supervisors and executive staff need to make sure they stay informed about the progress and the results.

Department/Community Relationships

Many participants expressed the opinion that communication between DHS and the community at large has improved since Mr. Rydingsword's appointment. There is a consistent perception that more avenues are opening for community members to communicate with the department at multiple levels, and that the department wishes to serve as a partner in all efforts to provide integrated, collaborative human services. Some of the most frequent responses are summarized below.

- In one community group of 20 individuals, 18 cited as positive the department's efforts to include the community, giving examples such as Shared Leadership, Celebrating Safe Families, the new Blue Ribbon Commission, and this study.
- The Board of Supervisors has been more supportive of the department and seems to welcome new ideas.
- Community participants identified more positive interactions with the department recently, including opportunities to influence departmental policies and practices. Community members feel more like partners.
- A number of community representatives, as well as some department employees, expressed interest in supporting partnerships for family-focused services.

As in other topic areas, participants identified some areas for improvement. The need for increased interactions between the department and the community was cited, including more involvement with partner agencies such as Probation, the Sheriff's office, and the Public Health Department. Other examples included:

- Better sharing of information for clients served by both public and private systems.
- Some problem resolution is dependent on individuals, rather than on established systems and procedures.
- Some employees described limitations governing communication between themselves and community members.
- Historical community perspectives about the department, its practices, and its policies continue to affect current relationships.

DHS Communications

Generally speaking, employees at every level expressed their perceptions about the department's communication systems in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Responses included observations about communication within and between units, within and between divisions, and between levels of employees, supervisors, and executive staff. For those employees that offered responses about the department's communication strengths, typical comments included:

- The Communications Committee formed as a result of the department's self-analyzing SWOT process (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, June 2008) was a positive step.
- Communication within units is strong, supportive.
- Regular communication with supervisors, Deputy Directors, and the Director is helpful.
- Communication within Divisions was generally described positively.
- Many employees indicated they are asked for input on programs.

In some instances, employees expressed concerns and identified opportunities for improving intra-departmental communication. Similar to most organizations, responses generally addressed communication through chains of command as well as communication across divisions. Examples include:

- Some protocols and practices may limit communication to and from executive levels and across divisions, delaying the transmission of ideas, information, and concerns.
- About 25% of the employees felt that avenues for staff input could be improved.
- Verbal communications tend to get lost or misunderstood when not followed up in writing.
- Confidentiality sometimes becomes a communication barrier within the department.

DHS Staff and Leadership Development

As with communication, most participants addressed areas of strength and weakness in staff development issues. A consistent perception expressed at all levels was that employees are committed to their jobs because they are committed to serving Mariposa County residents. Employees consistently saw themselves and their co-workers as being client focused and determined to do everything they can to help. The most frequent responses about strengths were:

- Teamwork and co-worker support contribute to a unit's success.
- Good clerical and support staff help all programs be more successful.
- Most employees are skilled, experienced, and well trained for their jobs. They have a passion for and are committed to what they do.
- Employees work to support each other in times of crisis.
- Innovation and positive change at the middle management level supports staff development.

The area of concern most frequently cited about staff and leadership development was training, including cross training for current employees or training for new employees and employees transferred to new assignments. The five most frequent responses were related to:

- Cross-system training, particularly training about services and procedures in each division;
- Training for new employees to better understand the department as a whole and for transferred employees to learn more before they are assigned job duties. An example was supervisory training for employees at the time of promotion.
- Turnover rates that contribute to greater numbers of employees with not enough training, since they often must start work before adequate training can be provided.
- Policies that don't allow more flexible training practices across divisions so current employees can learn what they need to provide better client services.
- Employee reassignments that result in uneven distribution of workloads and limited opportunities for training.

Service Delivery

Questions 1 through 7 in the questionnaires, although tailored for each participant group, were designed to:

- ◇ Assess the community's knowledge about the department and its services,
- ◇ Rate satisfaction levels with interactions with the department;
- ◇ Describe the community's sense of partnership with the department;
- ◇ Identify opportunities for improvement.

The majority of the participants expressed the opinion that the DHS mission is to provide comprehensive human services to community residents in need. Most of the examples of DHS contributions to the community were grouped around specific service components, such as public assistance programs, mental health, substance abuse services, keeping children with families, and "safety net" programs. The majority of the respondents in all groups (except clients) described themselves as being at least "reasonably well informed" about the department's role in the community and the services provided. The five most common responses about the department's mission, role and service delivery were (not in any priority order):

- Provide services that improve residents' quality of life
- Protect children and adults who can't protect themselves
- Do the best possible with limited resources
- Deliver mandated services and provide emergency services when needed.
- Work with community organizations to improve and coordinate services.

Community groups and clients were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with the types of services offered by the department. The related questions included perceptions about the extent to which the department is fulfilling its role, the sense of partnership between the community, including clients, and the department, and satisfaction with interactions with the department and/or services received.

- 85% of the clients who responded indicated they generally received the services they wanted; 62% indicated they were satisfied with the services they received.

- Community responses reflect an increasing level of satisfaction with the department's openness to community input.
- The majority of the community and client responses reflect satisfaction with the types of services offered.
- 30% of the clients indicate that interactions with the department have improved since their first encounter, and 85% felt that DHS employees care about them and their families.
- Employee responses reflect perceptions that the department is providing the best services with the staff and resources available to empower clients to reach their full potential.

As previously described, foster parents and foster youth were also asked to respond to some questions that were specific to foster care. The responses were typically focused on specific services viewed as departmental strengths, including:

- The department offers transportation services, support for issues of loss and grief, and mental health services.
- Foster parents receive mental health training.
- Foster youth have a clothing allowance

Some respondents in each group identified areas that were perceived as open for improvement. The types of issues varied by group, but several themes were common across all groups.

- Community and inter-departmental education about DHS and its services was identified as a need by all groups except foster youth. Over 50% of clients expressed little or no knowledge about the department's mission or scope of services, and several community members and employees made similar observations.
- Challenges in service delivery caused by DHS under-staffing, staff turnover rates, and resource limitations were cited by a number of community members, clients, and employees.
- Concerns about services generally ranged from access (waiting times, lengthy applications, limitations on some types of services) to the need for more services

for specialized populations, such as parents, persons with anger management issues, adolescents (including foster youth), County jail inmates, and people in isolated communities. A lack of resources in the community for DHS clients was also cited by community and employee participants.

- The need for coordinated case planning was identified by community respondents, clients, and employees. Multi-system families often have to be in several places at once to get services. For example, of the 32 clients that self-identified as receiving mental health services, 21 (66%) also received Medi-Cal and 14 qualified for Food Stamps. Eight of nine respondents involved with child welfare also received mental health services, as did 6 of 7 clients receiving substance abuse services.
- Several community respondents, employees, and clients cited the department's scattered locations as barriers to access.

The responses from foster parents and foster youth regarding service delivery concerns were similar to the types of responses currently found in nationwide studies of foster care issues. Some of the perceptions expressed by foster parents included:

- Orientation and training needs to include department services, budget and stipends, community resource information.
- Supportive services for foster families such as counseling and specialized training are helpful but too limited.
- Mutual information-sharing is critical for foster parents, foster youth, and social workers.

Foster youth expressed concerns about placement practices, self sufficiency, and personal rights. Again, the responses are comparable to input from foster youth in nationwide studies. In some instances, difficulties may occur when social workers from other counties are unable to meet requirements for youth placed in Mariposa County.

- Visits to foster homes and introductions to foster parents prior to placement did not occur for about half of the foster youth participants. Several expressed concern about not receiving a written list of their rights.
- Some foster youth felt they didn't get enough services or get the services they actually needed.

- Responses from several youth indicated they felt that investigative procedures and compliance with visit requirements could be improved.
- Several expressed the need for more confidentiality, training for transition to adulthood, and services appropriate to age, maturity and behavior.

Summary

Generally speaking, the majority of the responses were positive for all categories explored during the interviews. The range of services offered appears to be acceptable, although some respondents identified the need for new or expanded services. A number of participants described a new sense of hope because Mr. Rydingsword has demonstrated a commitment to improving both external and internal relationships that support community-wide partnerships for service delivery. However, a consistent element during the facilitated groups was the effect of a history of negative relationships between DHS and the community, and within the department itself. It was acknowledged that there have been improvements under the current Director, but it was apparent that many individuals have a “wait and see” attitude.

Small communities in particular may be impacted by history, long-standing relationships and practices, and day-to-day interactions that are more likely to go unnoticed in larger, more urban settings. However, the mix of positive and negative responses from each participant group was consistent with typical results generated by similar studies throughout the industry. The sections that follow address conclusions that may be drawn from the aggregation and analysis of the information received and recommendations for strategies to be considered in future planning.

Change Management

For the most part, the Director’s vision for systemic change is perceived as positive by both community and department staff. The concept of family-focused services, with implications for coordinated, integrated services, is viewed as the most optimum environment for effective human services. However, perceptions expressed in several of the interview groups indicate the need for a structured, purposeful approach to change.

Typical concerns focused on perceptions that system and program changes proposed in recent months, while likely to result in improved quality of care, are being pursued on several fronts, each independent of the others. Both the community and the

employees expressed the desire for a change process that is purposeful, systematic, and inclusive of key stakeholders, those who will be affected by change. Specific elements highlighted in the interview groups included:

- innovative and accountable leadership;
- data-informed advance planning;
- collaborative development and implementation;
- internal and external communication; and
- accountability for follow-through.

RECOMMENDATION:

- The Department should consider adopting a change management process that supports an environment within which change can occur in a systematic, outcome-oriented process, both within the department and in its community partnerships. There are many different change management models that can be assessed in the context of the Department's goals and objectives. Examples include the McKinsey 7-S Model, Lewin's Change Management Model, and Kotter's Eight Step Change Model. Other models are available in the public domain; several may be adapted to meet the needs of an organization contemplating critical changes in structure and style.
- Regardless of the model selected, there are seven factors that should be part of the model: shared values, strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, and skills, which all work collectively to form the model (12Manage, 2007). It will also be of critical importance to assure that any change model adopted by DHS is compatible with the "one big family" atmosphere usually present in a small community.
- Change management requires committed change agents; for DHS, the Deputy Directors are the logical change agents. As mid-level executive staff, they are instrumental in creating the agility that enables the organization to swiftly respond to its environment. No matter how many times the plan changes, they must clearly understand and deliver the directive, serve as conveyors of information from those affected by change to the decision-makers, and elicit the support, commitment, and optimal performance of personnel requisite to maintaining a forward momentum. A recommended strategy to support their effectiveness is to

assure that they have the tools they need – training, mentoring, responsibility, accountability, and trust.

Department/Community Relations

The majority of the individuals and agencies interviewed are pleased with the open communication policy that has been evolving since the beginning of Mr. Rydingsword's tenure. Individuals who participate in the Blue Ribbon Commission, Shared Leadership, and the System Improvement Plan meetings expressed the feeling that their voices are heard and they have some influence on DHS service delivery.

At the service delivery level, communication about specific issues is not perceived as being as open and effective as it is at executive levels. According to group participants, the current belief is that the most effective way to get service issues addressed is to contact Mr. Rydingsword directly.

During the group interviews, the SWERT team members also noted that, in some instances, interaction between the department and the community occurs because individual parties work together on an ad hoc basis. It was reported that person-to-person contact at a staff level was sometimes the most effective method of resolving points of conflict or concern. However, it does not allow for using these events as opportunities to effect system change. By depending on people instead of process, informal communication systems may cease to exist when the individuals move on to other venues.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Maintaining the existing forums for community and DHS interaction will serve to maintain partnerships and participation with key organizational stakeholders. The need for additional committees, task forces, or focus groups may arise over time, but stability and continuity will best be served by assuring that regular, periodic meetings occur.
- Although agencies have opportunities to participate as described above, private citizens and other interested individuals may not have the same access to such committee meetings. The department should consider hosting periodic "town hall" meetings, perhaps quarterly, during non-business hours to allow for broader participation. The meetings could be built around specific topics each time and advertised to reach greater audiences. Such meetings would demonstrate that

DHS really has embarked on a new era, distinctly different from the role that the department played in the community in the past.

- An additional benefit to utilizing a change management model, described above, would be ongoing communication and interaction with community partners as everyday occurrences, increasing the likelihood that all interested parties stay informed as DHS evolves to a family-focused system of human service delivery.
- The current practice of direct communication with the Director on specific, often confidential client-related issues, while attractive to some community members, is not the most effective business practice. The Deputy Directors, with authority and accountability for daily operations, are responsible for evaluation and response when such issues arise. Assignment of a Deputy Director to serve as a community liaison team would help assure that service issues are addressed in a timely manner and at the appropriate level. The assigned Deputy would also serve as the link between the community and the executive team, assuring that systemic issues are addressed administratively as needed.

DHS Communications

As previously stated, employees at every level expressed their perceptions about the department's communication systems in terms of strengths and weaknesses. While communications within units and divisions were generally described as strengths, communication between divisions and department-wide were described in less positive terms. The consistent themes were difficulties in maintaining both lateral and vertical communications to the extent necessary to assure inclusion of employees at every level, and internal protocols and practices that impede rather than support communication.

In the summer of 2008 DHS participated in a self-analyzing SWOT process (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, June 2008). The process resulted in an Action Plan (a draft is included in Exhibit 1) based on four major goals:

1. To advance the Department's Human Capacity to its maximum potential;
2. To promote an effective Administration within the Department;
3. To promote a unified vision for the Department; and
4. To support a dynamic Workplace Culture within the Department.

Each of the four goals included one or more objectives and processes for achieving the objectives. One product of the Action Plan has been the formation of the Strategic Planning Committee and four Subcommittees – Mentoring, Workforce Planning, Communication and Mediation, and the Staff Development Team. The Committee and Subcommittees are linked to specific objectives in the Action Plan (Exhibit 2). The Succession Planning Committee does not appear to be linked to the Action Plan.

At this time, the Strategic Planning Committee is awaiting receipt of this report to use it as a planning tool, and the Succession Planning Committee is awaiting action by the Strategic Planning Committee. The four Subcommittees are meeting regularly, but the review team was unable to determine whether meeting minutes are kept in a central place for all four.

Several participants in employee work groups expressed the opinion that “there are a lot” of committee meetings, giving the sense that employees feel like meetings sometimes interfere with workload management. At the same time, some employees seemed unaware of the committees’ existence or purpose, having heard about them for the first time during the interview groups.

Preliminary review of the Committee and Subcommittee links to the action plan and memberships indicate that there may be some duplication of focus between committees (Workforce and Communication are both addressing Objective 2C) and a number of employees serve on more than one committee. Of 24 members across all six committees, five employees serve on three committees and two serve on three committees.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Review of the committees and their purpose may identify opportunities to consolidate some committees or combine functions, decreasing the number and reducing the potential for duplicate or parallel processes that may be conflicting or contradictory.
- Composition of the committees should also be reviewed. When individual employees are involved in multiple committees, it is possible that their co-workers are feeling the effect of their absences on workload management. It also can cause resentment against that employee and the management process.

- Opportunities for a greater number of employees to participate on committees will serve to increase employee involvement and ownership of the strategic planning process and give a greater sense of fairness and equity.
- Efforts to increase communication to employees about the committees, their activities, and the potential outcomes for the employees and the organization should minimize the sense of being “left out” and uninformed.
- Because committee processes tend to be spread out over time, committees are not usually the most effective mechanism for addressing the day-to-day, often precipitous need for communication at many levels. Again, the Deputy Directors (defined as middle managers for this illustration) are the critical communication links between staff and the Director (please see Exhibit 3). They should have the time, flexibility, and support needed to understand new challenges, assess communication issues, collaborate with their peers and subordinates to develop solutions, and monitor the effects of change.

Staff/leadership Development

Review of departmental documents indicated there are standard training requirements for all new employees, usually through Human Resources, as well as specific training modules in each Division. However, training for newly assigned staff seemed to be of particular importance. While acknowledging that staff turnover rates and workload issues sometimes required that workers assume new functions with little advance training, employees maintained that there had to be a systematic solution to the problem.

Leadership training for newly selected supervisors and opportunities for professional growth and development were also consistent themes. With a relatively small labor pool, candidates for promotion may have had few opportunities to gain leadership experience in their usual job settings. On-the-job learning for supervisors often results in variations in the development of leadership skills and abilities.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Planned, systematic cross-training between units and between divisions should be considered as a means for enhancing employee knowledge about the organization and for building a labor pool with the potential for inter-disciplinary

support. One strategy that might be considered when time and workload allow would be to pair employees with similar or related functions in different units and allow them to train each other.

- Multi-disciplinary training will support the move toward family-focused services. One strategy is development of a training plan based on specific skills and abilities that will be needed in comprehensive service settings. Topics might include basic interviewing skills, concepts in team approaches to services, etc. While such training may be time-consuming and not directly applicable to current functions, investment in advance preparation of a workforce will support a more seamless transition in the future.
- In small organizations and geographically isolated communities, there may be limited availability of trained leadership candidates. A proactive approach offers opportunities to develop and expand that segment of the labor market. There are a number of established leadership training programs available, many in the public domain and available at little or no cost.
- A partnership between DHS and community resources, particularly in education, should be considered as a means of making such training available to local residents, including DHS employees. Websites such as The Free Management Library and an extensive number of online sources offer resources that can be used to develop local training for individuals and groups in a variety of leadership and management topics.
- The Central California Training Academy at CSU Fresno serves as a social services and behavioral health training resource and is available to county organizations. In addition, development of a community-based training academy should be explored as an option for other local workforce and leadership development resources.
- The existing DHS Succession Planning Committee is a logical source for pursuing leadership training opportunities for department staff.

Service Delivery

Several perspectives emerged about DHS service delivery:

- As illustrated in Exhibit 4, clients generally got the services they wanted and were satisfied with services received.
- The majority of community participants and employees believe that DHS is doing the best possible with available resources.
- At a general level, the community is relatively satisfied with service delivery functions.
- Community and employee groups talked about similar service delivery strengths and opportunities for improvement.

At first review, the responses regarding service delivery needs and concerns appear to be about services. A number of responses reflect the need for expansion of existing services, availability of a broader range of services, more human resources, and more timely access. However, closer analysis of the data indicates that many issues expressed as services related are actually about communication rather than about the services themselves.

Specific comments addressed communication when service or program changes are being planned, case-specific communications, and education about service mandates and limitations. There are indications that improvements in communication systems have the potential for addressing many of the service delivery issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A review of systems now in place for periodically evaluating customer satisfaction may offer opportunities to improve the outcomes of some services.
- An ongoing plan for identifying and prioritizing service needs can put DHS in a position to respond quickly when resources become available for new or expanded services.
- As stated in the Change Management section, designation of a Deputy Director to serve as a community/DHS liaison for addressing service-specific issues, including monitoring and follow-up of results, will help improve some perceptions about service delivery functions.
- The Director has already initiated evaluation of evidence-based practices and innovative models for improved service delivery and utilization of resources. Possible options may include: SB 163 Wraparound services for youth at risk of

group home placement, use of MHSA funding to prevent mental health hospitalization and incarceration, and opportunities for CalWORKs recipients to gain work experience in real-world service environments.

In Conclusion

There appears to be ample evidence from which to infer several conclusions:

- DHS and the community have the will to work in partnership for the well-being of Mariposa County residents.
- In spite of its small size, the community has the human capital needed to grow and develop a comprehensive range of social and behavioral services.

Over the course of the Project it has been evident that the journey has already begun from traditional, historically limited relationships and human service modalities to open, innovative opportunities to improve the quality of life for Mariposa County communities. It is our sincere hope that this study will serve as a stepping-stone along the way.

EXHIBIT 1

	<p>1D. To conduct cost/benefit analysis of enhancing the compensation package for employees.</p>	<p>1D1. Engage the Union and County in dialogue.</p> <p>1D2. Present to employees a range of options that illustrate increases in the compensation package compared against “trade offs” that must be adopted to accommodate desired enhancements.</p>		
<p>2. To promote an effective ADMINISTRATION within the Department.</p>	<p>2A. To promote accountability from the top among supervisors and managers.</p> <p>2B. To establish work processes that ensures that if a question is posed by an employee that s/he receives a timely answer.</p> <p>2C. To create an opportunity for staff to voice concerns or seek confidential assistance with complex work-life issues.</p> <p>2D. To foster informative communications within the Department (top to bottom; bottom to top; and, lateral).</p>	<p>2A1. Support regular and consistent supervision.</p> <p>2B1. Support regular and consistent coaching between designated supervisors/managers and staff.</p> <p>2C1. Explore the development of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).</p> <p>2D1. Inspire communication channels that are not driven by individual personalities and that are respectful of both process and organizational hierarchies.</p>		
<p>3. To promote a UNIFIED VISION for the</p>	<p>3A. To honor the history of the Department and to</p>	<p>3A1. Operationalize a state-of-the-art physical</p>		

EXHIBIT 1

<p>Department</p>	<p>continue with its evolution by focusing on the Department's constituencies and their needs.</p>	<p>space in which to consolidate the Department's work units.</p> <p>3A2. Communicate a vision statement that reflects leadership's vision and the staff's ability to work as a team.</p>		
<p>4. To support a dynamic WORKPLACE CULTURE within the Department.</p>	<p>4A. To establish initiatives to celebrate employees or to acknowledge value of work contribution(s).</p>	<p>4A1. Define and implement an "Employee of the Month" program.</p> <p>4A2. Reinstigate the "Secret Pal" program.</p> <p>4A3. Develop and promote something akin to "Catch Somebody Caring" program to immediately acknowledge work above and beyond expectations.</p>		

EXHIBIT 2

<p><u>Strategic Planning Committee (SPC-formerly SWOT)</u> (Formed January 2008) (Action Plan – 3A) 1. John Lawless (Chair) 2. Emily Casselman 3. Andrea Summerlin 4. Curtis Hinton 5. Karen Robinson</p>	<p><u>Workforce Planning Subcommittee</u> (Formed October 2008) (Action Plan – 1D, 2C and 4A) 1. Pam Hawkins (Co-chair) 2. Wendy Sternberg (Co-chair) 3. Debbie Bissmeyer 4. Volney Dunavan 5. Julia Brown 6. Andrea Summerlin</p>
<p><u>Succession Planning Committee (SPC)</u> (Formed February 2008) 1. Debbie Smith (Chair) 2. Anthony Rios 3. Karen Briese 4. Pam Hawkins 5. Angela Philips 6. Wendy Sternberg 7. Jenni Moore</p>	<p><u>Communication and Mediation Subcommittee</u> (Formed October 2008) (Action Plan – 2C and 2D) 1. Amanda Loftis (Chair) 2. Jennifer McClain 3. Genaye Mower 4. Maria Swiecki</p>
<p><u>Mentoring Subcommittee</u> (Formed October 2008) (Action Plan - 1C) 1. Karen Briese (Chair) 2. Debbie Ciapponi 3. Marta Lagares 4. Jeanie Seymour 5. Sarah Gleason 6. Curtis Hinton</p>	<p><u>Staff Development Team</u> Formed October 2008) (Action Plan – 1B) (Jim Rydingsword (Chair) 1. Nancy Bell 2. Curtis Hinton 3. Debbie Ciapponi 4. Anthony Rios 5. Karen Briese</p>

EXHIBIT 3

Middle Management as Communicators

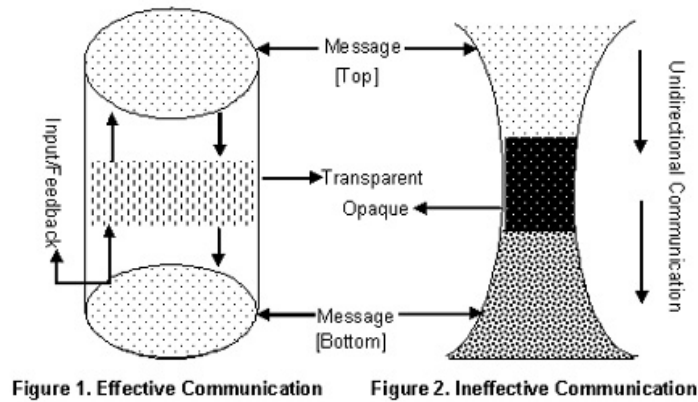


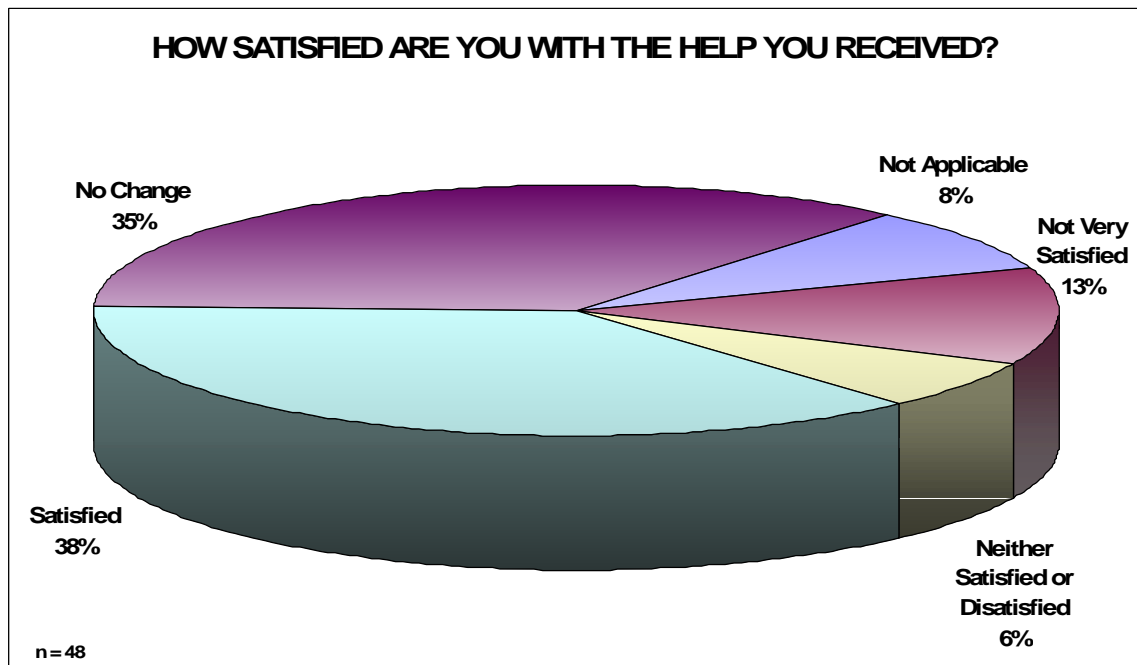
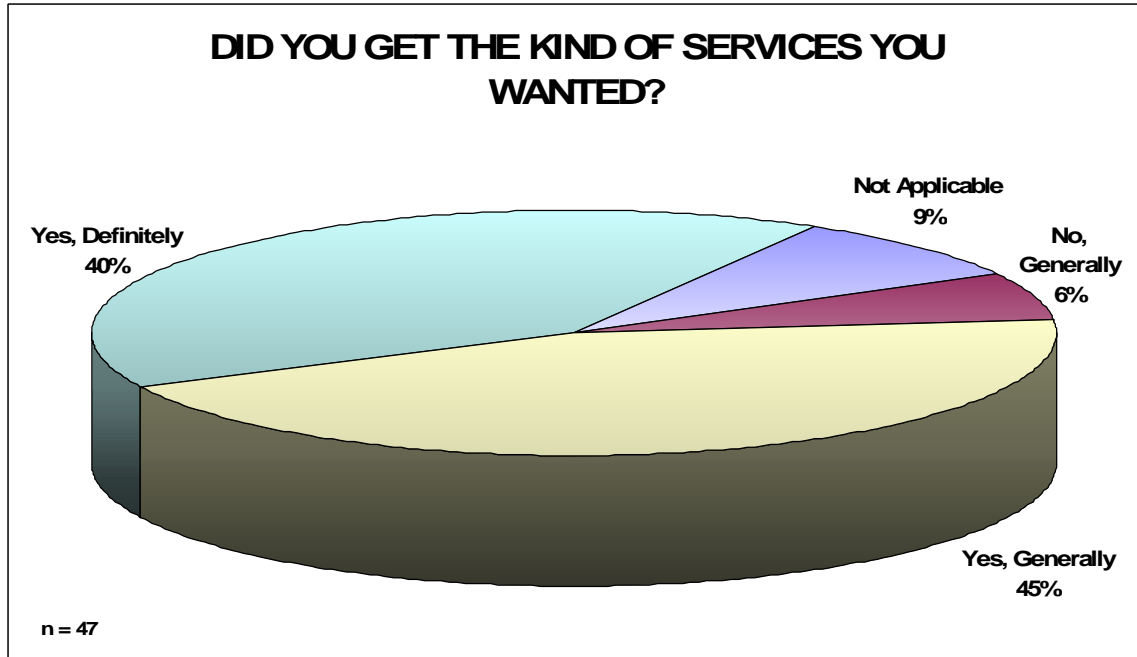
Figure 1 shows how middle management processes communication so that both ends of the organization receive the intended message. The similarity of the dots at the top and bottom indicates that the essence of a message is not lost in translation. The upward and downward arrows show that information flows both ways. The transparency of the middle depicts the realism that characterizes communication. Management demonstrates trust in organizational members by presenting facts in a timely, direct manner.

Figure 2 shows a distortion in the message that the bottom receives. This occurs for a number of reasons. Middle management may not have clarity on the scope of proposed change. It may not be communicating as quickly as necessary, thereby causing a glut of information, which can create confusion. As a control mechanism, it may choose to communicate bits and pieces, giving workers just enough information to complete specific assignments. Whatever the reason, poor communication causes operational upheavals and erodes credibility over time.³

³ Condit, *It's Tough To Be A Middle Manager*, Peter Adebi, August 14, 2006

EXHIBIT 4

Sample Client Questionnaire Results



ATTACHMENT A

MARIPOSA COUNTY
Community Focus Group - Organizations

The Human Services Department and the Community

1. What do you think is the most important contribution the Human Services Department makes to the people of Mariposa County?

2. What do you think the Department's contribution to the community should be?

3. How knowledgeable do you feel about the Department and its role in the community?

4. In your experience, how well does the Department provide the services for which it is responsible?

5. What are the indications, if any, that the Department views your organization's services as an important component of the county's human services systems?

- 6. What are the indications, if any, that the Department does not view your organization's services as an important component of the county's human services systems?

- 7. In what ways have you had opportunities to influence the way the Department serves the community?

Department Services

- 8. How does your organization interact with the Department?

- 9. Please describe your organization's current level of satisfaction with interactions with the Department.

- 10. Over the course of your organization's interactions with the Department, do you feel that the level of satisfaction has gotten better, gotten worse, or remained the same? Please explain.

- 11. Do you feel that the relationship between your organization and the Department helps your clients, doesn't make much difference to your clients, or has a negative impact on your clients? Please explain.

- 12. If you or one of your organization's clients encounters a concern with the Department, how is it resolved?

Additional Questions or Comments

MARIPOSA COUNTY Community Focus Groups

The Mariposa County Department of Human Services has joined with the Social Welfare Research Center at Fresno State in a project to assess the way the Department serves county residents. We need to hear your about the Department and its services. Filling out this questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous. Nobody at the Department will see your answers because all surveys will be sent directly to Fresno State for review. The information will be used to help the Department have a better understanding of people’s needs.

We are interested in your honest opinion, positive or negative. The following questions refer to how much you know about the Department, what experiences you have had with the Department and its services, and whether those services have been satisfactory. Please circle your response to each question.

Date completed: _____ Location completed: _____

- 1. What do you think is the most important contribution the Human Services Department makes to the people of Mariposa County?

- 2. What do you think the Department’s contribution to the community should be?

- 3. How well informed do you feel about the Department and its role in the community?

- 4. In your opinion, how well is the Department serving the community?

- 5. In what ways has your knowledge or experience made you feel that the Department does, or does not, view community residents and organizations as important partners in the work the Department does?

6. In what ways have you had opportunities to influence the way the Department serves the community, if you wished to do so?

7. In what ways have you interacted with the Department?

8. What is your current level of satisfaction with your experiences with the Department?

9. Over the course of your history with the Department, do you feel that the experiences have gotten better, gotten worse, or remained the same? Please explain.

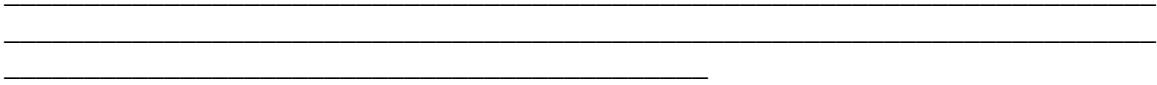
10. Do you feel that the relationship between you and the Department helps you, doesn't make much difference, or has a negative impact? Please explain.

11. If you have had a concern with the Department, how is it resolved?

Please provide any additional comments you have about the Department and the services it provides.

Positive comments:

Negative comments:



Mariposa County Client Questionnaire

The Mariposa County Department of Human Services has joined with the Social Welfare Research Center at Fresno State in a project to assess the way the Department serves county residents. We need to hear your about the Department and its services. Filling out this questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous, and will in no way affect any services you may be receiving now or may receive in the future. Nobody at the Department will see your answers because all surveys will be sent directly to Fresno State for review. The information will be used to help the Department have a better understanding of people's needs.

We are interested in your honest opinion, positive or negative. The following questions refer to how much you know about the Department, what kinds of services you received, and whether those services have been satisfactory. Please circle your response to each question.

Date completed: _____ Location completed: _____

1. How well do you understand the Department's role in the community?

4	3	2	1
-----	-----	-----	-----
Very well	Reasonably well	Not very well	Not at all

2. How well informed do you feel about the Department's services?

4	3	2	1
-----	-----	-----	-----
Very well informed	Reasonably well	Not very well	No idea

3. How likely do you think it is that you could change the way the Department serves the community, if you wanted to do so?

4	3	2	1
-----	-----	-----	-----
Very likely	Reasonably likely	Not very likely	No chance at all

4. If you have been involved with the Department, please check all the appropriate areas.

Child Welfare Services
 Adult Social Services
 Medi-Cal
 Food Stamps
 Temporary cash aid
 Housing Assistance
 Home weatherization
 Mental Health services
 Substance Use Services

----- Other – please describe: _____

5. If you have received services from the Department, did you get the kind of services you wanted?

4	3	2	1
-----	-----	-----	-----
Yes, definitely	Yes, generally	No, generally	Definitely not

6. How satisfied are you with the help you received?

MARIPOSA COUNTY
Employee Interviews

I. Department Mission

- A. In your view, what is the Department's role in serving the residents of Mariposa County?

- B. Do you think that most of the employees understand the Department's mission the same way?

- C. From your perspective, is the Department fulfilling its mission to the community?

- D. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which the Department serves the community? Please give some examples.

II. Service Functions

- A. Do you feel you have an understanding of the work performed by the three divisions in the Department?

- B. Do you feel that the connections between the work done by your division and the work done by other divisions are clearly defined?

- C. What are three major strengths of your unit?

D. What are three major problems your unit is facing?

E. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which your unit serves the residents of Mariposa County? Please give some examples.

F. In your opinion, does your unit have the resources needed to meet the expectations of the Department and the community? Please give examples.

G. Do you feel that you understand your assigned role and how your work contributes to the Department's mission?

H. Do you have opportunities to influence decisions about services and program planning?

III. Additional questions or comments

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Director Interviews

IV. Department Mission

- A. In your view, what is the Department's role in serving the residents of Mariposa County?

- B. Do you think that most of the employees understand the Department's mission the same way?

- C. From your perspective, is the Department fulfilling its mission to the community?

- D. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which the Department serves the community? Please give some examples.

V. Service Functions

- I. Do you feel that employees in each division have an understanding of the work performed by the three divisions?

- J. Do you feel that the connections between the divisions are clearly defined?

- K. What are three major strengths of the Department?

L. What are three major problems the Department is facing?

M. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which the Department serves the residents of Mariposa County? Please give some examples.

N. In your opinion, does the Department have the resources needed to meet your expectations and the expectations of the community, including the County Board of Supervisors and other County agencies? Please give examples.

O. How do you see your role in contributing to the Department's mission?

P. Do you feel that employees at every level have opportunities to influence decisions about services and program planning?

VI. Additional questions or comments

MARIPOSA COUNTY
Deputy Director Interviews

VII. Department Mission

A. In your view, what is the Department's role in serving the residents of Mariposa County?

B. Do you think that most of the employees understand the Department's mission the same way?

C. From your perspective, is the Department fulfilling its mission to the community?

D. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which the Department serves the community? Please give some examples.

VIII. Service Functions

Q. Do you feel you have an understanding of the work performed by the three divisions?

R. Do you feel that the connections between the work done by your division and the work done by other divisions are clearly defined?

S. How familiar are you with the Department's revenue sources and fiscal activities?

T. What are three major strengths of your division?

U. What are three major problems the division is facing?

V. Are there changes you think would improve the ways in which your division serves the residents of Mariposa County? Please give some examples.

W. In your opinion, does your division have the resources needed to meet the expectations of the Department and the community? Please give examples.

X. Do you feel that you understand your assigned role and how your work contributes to the Department's mission?

Y. Do you have opportunities to influence decisions about services and program planning?

IX. Additional questions or comments
