DEPARTMENT: Human Services/SS
Child Welfare and Protection

BY: Cheryle Rutherford-Kelly
PHONE: 966-2442

RECOMMENDED ACTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

In conjunction with our community partners, it is respectfully recommended that your Board: (1) review the state mandated Self Improvement Program; and (2) authorize the Department to submit the report to the State.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:

Please see attachment.

ALTERNATIVES AND CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

Please see attachment.

Financial Impact? ( ) Yes (X) No
Budgeted in Current FY? ( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Partially Funded
Amount in Budget: $_______
Additional Funding Needed: $_______
Source:
Internal Transfer
Unanticipated Revenue
Transfer Between Funds
Contingency
( ) General ( ) Other

CLERK'S USE ONLY:
Res. No.: 430 Ord. No. ______
Vote - Ayes: ______ Noes: ______
Absent: ______

Approved ______ Minute Order Attached ( ) No Action Necessary

The foregoing instrument is a correct copy of the original on file in this office.
Date: ______
Attest: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board
County of Mariposa, State of California
By: ________________________
Deputy

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER:
( ) Requested Action Recommended
( ) No Opinion
Comments:

CAO: P.H.
TO: Members, Board of Supervisors  
    Rich Inman, CAO  
FROM: Cheryle Rutherford-Kelly  
RE: Social Services Child Welfare Program / Review of Report to Be Sent to the California State Department of Social Services  

Recommendation  

In conjunction with our community partners, it is respectfully recommended that your Board: (1) review the state mandated Self Improvement Program; and (2) authorize the Department to submit the report to the State.  

Background  

Three years ago (July, 2001), your Board authorized the reorganization of Human Services. One of the major components was the redesign of our child welfare/protective services unit. This Department moved from an investigative approach to child abuse to a counseling model. Under this model, investigation was left to the Sheriff's Department and Child Welfare took responsibility for conducting systematic risk assessment and providing counseling to children and their families. The two agencies continue to work closely together towards safeguarding children.  

Development of a single, integrated case plan was implemented for clients being served by two or more divisions of social services in order to avoid multiple conflicting case plans. This concept has been expanded to include other agencies working with the same clients. Once the County assumed responsibility for Mental Health, joint case plans and coordinated services were expanded.  

After our efforts, the federal and state governments mandated (AB 636) that counties redesign their child welfare systems. There are massive paper requirements that, in our particular case, serve to take efforts from caseloads. In the spirit of cooperation, we have tried to use the mandate as an evaluation tool that helps to determine the degree to which the previously “redesigned” child welfare system is working.  

Current Situation  

What the Community Has Asked For  

We have had group and individual meetings with department heads and the myriad of agencies that interface with Child Welfare. A list of the majority of those participants is shown on Page 4 (circle page 7) of the report that is attached. To meet the requirements of the state, a formal meeting was held two months ago. When asked what they would like changed in terms of the current child welfare system, no changes were requested. This is absolutely phenomenal simply because in the majority of counties there is constant conflict surrounding child welfare and protection. It is such good news that it is of concern because it means we cannot in anyway lessen the intensity of services and our efforts to work with other agencies.
The group was concerned about the lack of parenting classes that can act as a preventive measure or assist troubled parents to better understand the needs of their children. The schools will be starting a parenting class that will serve to assist parents. In addition, to serve very troubled parents and to mitigate the closure of the Mental Health Children’s System of Care due to the Governor’s budget, this agency will be starting an evening parenting group this month. The group will be co-led by a male child welfare social worker and a female mental health clinician.

The Variables in Back of the Statistics

The most important thing in child welfare and protection is child safety. We must prevent reinjury and death even knowing that no system is fail safe. That is why there are case staffings and meetings with other departments on an ongoing basis.

The State required that we use statistics from prior years rather than current statistics. In fact, we looked at both. To ignore FY 03/04 statistics when they are readily available would be to ignore indicators that might help us to strengthen the system.

There are statistics that help to determine just how safe our children are but numbers alone do not reflect community standards. The standards for child welfare in this County are very high. For that reason, we receive twice the number of referrals as the statewide average (referrals per 1000 residents under age 18 is 118.9 for Mariposa as compared to the statewide figure of 57.4). The figure does not mean that we have twice the amount of child abuse although it could easily be interpreted that way. The much more likely reason is that many of those referrals (37%) are for general neglect. This County responds to general neglect (screens calls in for service) that other counties would screen out. We respond to 72.6% of all cases referred to us which means we are “screening out” 27.4%. We respond to all cases of physical abuse and molest. Generally, when counties begin to screen out (not respond to) over 40% of their referrals, especially when there are indicators of physical abuse and/or sexual molest, they commence to have missing children, reinjury or worse.

We receive approximately 33 referrals per month (405 referrals during FY 03/04). Approximately half (208 families/51%) of those referrals were substantiated (found to be true). Other referrals may be inconclusive rather than unfounded. In those situations, services are nonetheless offered to the family either from our agency or one of our community partners.

The fact that we respond to fairly lightweight general neglect (37% of the total referrals) throws our statistics off in another arena. We appear to have a higher rate of recurrence of child maltreatment than the state average. However, when we looked at every single case of recurrence, it was general neglect being reported a second time (house/yard messy again) and a case that has divorced parents accusing one another of every child crime imaginable. We did not have recurrence of child physical abuse and molest and, if we did, then our system would need rapid overhaul and correction.

Over the past six months, we have tried to serve more families in a prevention mode (family preservation) rapidly transferring the emergency response case to an ongoing counselor. We hope to assist the family before the situation warrants removal and Court intervention. With Alcohol and Drug now under Human Services, joint case work must intensify and such efforts commenced last month.
Risk Assessment

We continue to use systematic risk assessment at every critical decision point in child welfare (when to remove the child, what to recommend to the Court in terms of continued foster care, adoption or return to the care taker/parent). We have avoided using an actuarial model of risk assessment that limits services to children and parents based on their presenting problem. Counties and states using an actuarial/insurance model have found that parents are sometimes assigned worse problems than they actually have to allow time to work with them. This is understandable but produces a negative and false history on the parent.

We have all master level counselors in Child Welfare with one exception. That person is in his second year of graduate school. The supervisor of the unit holds a Master of Science degree in psychology and is a registered nurse. Cases are staffed with the supervisor. We have put into place every safeguard in the industry; your Board has approved a higher level of staff than is the norm with lower caseloads to allow sufficient time for counseling and monitoring. And still, we worry about the welfare and safety of the children who come to our attention.

Financial

Submission of this report does not have a financial impact. Failure to submit would have a cost impact in that our allocations could be reduced or delayed.
MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
MINUTE ORDER

TO: CHERYLE RUTHERFORD-KELLY, Human Services Director
FROM: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board
SUBJECT: STATE MANDATED SELF IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM REPORT
        Resolution No. 04-430

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,

ADOPTED THIS Order on September 28, 2004

ACTION AND VOTE:

Approval of the Consent Agenda (See End of the Minutes)

BOARD ACTION: It was noted that a change was presented for page 10 of item 4. Supervisor Bibby pulled items 1 and 4. Supervisor Balmain pulled item 5.

Supervisor Bibby initiated discussion relative to item 4 concerning the Self-Improvement Program report. She asked that the language in the report be clarified or removed relative to response to a continuing child custody dispute with the same allegation over and over again. She stated she feels strongly that each individual allegation should be investigated, and she asked the County Administrative Officer to review this matter. The Board concurred with deleting the language that was questioned wherever it appears in the document, and with directing that the Department investigate each individual allegation. (M)Bibby, (S)Stetson, item 4 was approved, with the wording change as discussed. Supervisor Stetson complimented the Human Services Department and the Sheriff’s Department for being ahead of what is mandated by the State for this program. Ayes: Unanimous.

CA-4 Review the State Mandated Self-Improvement Program and Authorize the Human Services Department to Submit the Report to the State (Human Services Director); Res. 04-430, with direction to staff

cc: File