

2003-2004 GRAND JURY REPORT

Riverside County Department of Social Services

Children's Service Division

Child Protective Services, Blythe

Background

The Children's Services Division of the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) provides individualized interventions to families in which child abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred. The vision is that every child in Riverside County will have a safe, permanent home, nurtured by stable families and strong communities committed to their well being.

The mission of the Children's Service Division is "to partner with communities and families to empower them to keep their children safe, healthy, at home, in school and out of trouble by":

- Advocating and providing accessible and responsive services to meet family needs.
- Developing and Sustaining Family Centered Practice.
- Integrating policy, research and practice.
- Ensuring communities are served by competent staff in sufficient numbers.

Children's Service Division offers comprehensive core services to children and their families within the boundaries of five (5) geographical regions. These core services include:

- Central Intake Center – A hotline for receiving information from community members and professionals dealing with children regarding suspected abuse or neglect in specific families.
- Emergency Response – Children Services staff members who access and intervene in situations of alleged abuse and neglect.

- Court Dependency – Staff members present cases to Juvenile Court for adjudication when children and families are in need of court intervention.
- Court Services – Children’s Services Court Officers prepare and present child abuse and neglect cases to Juvenile Court and communicate specific information on court proceedings to assigned social workers.
- Family Maintenance – Provide services to families whose children are able to remain safely in their own home while services are being provided to alleviate the risk of further abuse or neglect.
- Family Reunification - Services designed to help remedy the underlying causes of abuse and neglect, which when corrected would allow a child to return safely to his/her home.

Other programs and services include Permanency Programs (Adoption, Legal Guardianship, Planned Living Arrangement), Specialized Programs (preparing children in the foster care system for a self-sufficient adulthood and providing supportive services to facilitate self-sufficiency for families within the community) and Foster Care.

The Child Protective Service (CPS) Office in Blythe is located in the desert geographical region. This office is responsible to provide necessary services to children and their families in the Blythe Community as well as to the schools and probation department.

Blythe is the further most city in Eastern Riverside County, approximately 100 miles east from Indio, California. The Indio DPSS Office serves as a major support service center for the Blythe CPS Office. Blythe has a population of approximately 20,000, of whom 8,000 are incarcerated in two (2) State Prisons. Blythe is primarily an agricultural based economy with few employment opportunities. The major businesses include:

- One Hospital
- One Supermarket
- One SuperCenter
- One Community College
- Schools (K-12)
- A Natural Gas Pumping Station

According to the Blythe Chamber of Commerce, the median family income is \$35,324 and the Per Capita Income is \$14,224.

Findings

1. Blythe CPS Office does not have reasonable access to community services and county support systems that are required to implement the vision and missions of the Children's Service Division. Although money has been appropriated in the budget, the following services and support systems are **not** available in the Blythe Community:
 - Foster Care Facility
 - Temporary Shelter
 - Sufficient number of staff
 - Necessary Mental Health Department Support
2. The CPS, Blythe Office, does not have security-warning devices installed nor does it utilize an on-site security officer to provide protection for the staff. In more than one instance, angry parents or family members have threatened social workers.
3. Children who are removed from their home during late evening or early morning hours due to neglect or abuse are held in the CPS Office due to the unavailability of temporary shelters or Foster Care Facilities. A staff member must remain awake to ensure the child's safety and well-being.
4. In Blythe there are no temporary shelters or Foster Care Facilities for child placement. Children who are removed from a home in Blythe, are transported by CPS staff members to Indio or more distance locations within Riverside County; i.e. Moreno Valley, Corona and Riverside. These trips can take up to 6-8 hours.
5. Blythe CPS staff, which transport children (mid-day to late evening) to cities in Western Riverside County, are expected to work their normal work schedule the following day without sufficient rest.

6. In 2003, Blythe CPS staff recorded 228 trips out of Blythe. Approximately seventy percent (70%) of these trips were made to seven (7) cities in Riverside County including Indio (85), Moreno Valley (17), Corona (12), Cathedral City (12), Desert Hot Springs (11), Rancho Mirage (10), and Riverside (11). The purpose of the trips were for:
 - Family Visits
 - Child Placement
 - Court Appearances
 - Staff Training

7. Children, who are removed from their home in Blythe due to neglect or abuse, linger in the Foster Care System while their parents enter Department of Mental Health programs for counseling to become more responsible parents, as required by the courts.

8. Blythe CPS staff were using vehicles later to be found defective to transport children to placement locations in Riverside County. On two (2) separate occasions while transporting children and family members CPS staff experienced major mechanical problems, including brake malfunction and parts falling off the vehicle.

9. Blythe CPS teleconferencing system, which is utilized for training and would reduce traveling to Indio, has been inoperative for approximately two years.

10. The Blythe CPS Office budgeted position and actual staffing are shown in the chart below:

Positions Title	Budgeted	Actual
Social Worker	5	3
Office Assistant	1	1
Receptionist	1	0
Social Service Assistant	1	1
Total	8	5

Recommendations

Riverside County Board of Supervisors
Riverside County Department of Public Social Services
Riverside County Fleet Service Department
Riverside County Department of Mental Health
Riverside County Child Protective Services, Blythe

1. Department of Social Services immediately hire or reassign the required number of social workers, as budgeted, in Blythe to adequately support the mission of Children's Service Division.
2. Establish a temporary public shelter or contract with a local provider to provide temporary shelter of placement children who are removed from their homes during late evening or early morning hours.
3. Establish new Foster Care provider contracts and/or reactivate contracts with former Foster Care providers for child placement, with the approval of Community Care Licensing.
4. Repair, update and maintain the teleconferencing system in the Blythe CPS Office to reduce the number of trips for staff training.
5. Riverside County Fleet Service Department elevate vehicle maintenance standards for county vehicles used by the Blythe Children's Service staff members to ensure reliable mechanical operations and maximum safety.
6. The Department of Mental Health develop and implement a tracking system in Blythe to monitor the effectiveness of the Substance Abuse and other Mental Health counseling services provided to family members.
7. Install security devices (panic buttons, alarms, interface barriers between staff and public) to alert the staff and law enforcement of possible danger and provide protection for the clerical staff.
8. The Department of Mental Health in Blythe, provide the court required Substance Abuse counseling and other needed Mental Health Services for family members prior to returning the child to their home.

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