

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

125



FROM: Executive Office

SUBMITTAL DATE:
September 20, 2011

SUBJECT: Response to the 2010-11 Grand Jury Report: Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, Children's Service Division, Child Protective Services, Blythe

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board of Supervisors:

- 1) Approve with or without modifications, the attached response to the Grand Jury's recommendation regarding Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, Children's Service Division, Child Protective Services, Blythe.
- 2) Direct the Clerk of the Board to immediately forward the Board's finalized responses to the Grand Jury, to the Presiding Judge, and the County Clerk-Recorder (for mandatory filing with the State).

BACKGROUND: On July 26, 2011, the Board directed staff to prepare a draft of the Board's response to the Grand Jury's report regarding Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, Children's Service Division, Child Protective Services, Blythe.

Section 933 (c) of the Penal Code requires that the Board of Supervisors comment on the Grand Jury's recommendations pertaining to the matters under the control of the Board, and that a response be provided to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within 90 days.

90dayresponsef11DPSSBLYTHE09.11

FINANCIAL DATA	Current F.Y. Total Cost:	\$ N/A	In Current Year Budget: Budget Adjustment: For Fiscal Year:
	Current F.Y. Net County Cost:	\$	
	Annual Net County Cost:	\$	

SOURCE OF FUNDS:	Positions To Be Deleted Per A-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Requires 4/5 Vote	<input type="checkbox"/>

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE

BY:

Jay F. Orr
Jay F. Orr

County Executive Office Signature

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

On motion of Supervisor Buster, seconded by Supervisor Benoit and duly carried, IT WAS ORDERED that the above matter is approved as recommended.

Ayes: Buster, Benoit and Ashley
 Nays: None
 Absent: Tavaglione and Stone
 Date: September 20, 2011
 xc: EO, Grand Jury, Presiding Judge, DPSS, Recorder

Kecia Harper-Ihem
 Clerk of the Board
 By: *Kecia Harper-Ihem*
 Deputy

Prev. Agn. Ref.: 3.89 – 07/26/11 | District: | Agenda Number:

ATTACHMENTS FILED
 WITH THE CLERK OF THE BOARD

3.3

Departmental Concurrence

Dept's Recomm.: Consent Policy

Per Exec. Ofc.: Consent Policy

2010-11 GRAND JURY REPORT
DPSS Children's Service Division, Blythe

A. FINDINGS

Finding 1: Temporary Shelters

Testimony revealed that social workers are contacted several times a month to remove children from their homes in the Blythe area during late evening or early morning hours for alleged neglect or abuse and are held in the CPS office. This is because there are no temporary shelters available. Two (2) social workers must remain with these children to ensure the child's safety and well-being until an appropriate placement can be arranged.

Response 1:

Respondent disagrees partially with the finding.

In the Blythe office, there are occasions when two social workers are required to remain in the office with children while a placement is being located. This is dependent on the number and ages of the children removed that require placement and the amount of supervision needed while waiting for placement.

There is one Foster Family Agency home available in Blythe that will take children on an emergency basis; however, their capacity is limited and they cannot always accommodate the number of children removed at a single time (i.e., sibling sets). To enhance the local capacity for foster care, the Division will be initiating new foster parent recruitment efforts.

Finding 2: Foster Homes

In the fiscal year 2003-04, there were seven certified foster homes in Blythe, but at the time of this current report there are only two. In emergency situations foster homes may be utilized as temporary shelter homes.

Due to the low number of foster homes and lack of shelter facilities in Blythe, children must be transported to Indio or in some cases other communities as far away as Moreno Valley, Riverside, Corona and Fontana or Rancho Cucamonga in San Bernardino County. These trips can take up to 6-8 hours. This multiplies the time and expense incurred by the county, and the added emotional stress on the individual social workers as well as the anxiety placed on the recently displaced children.

Investigation revealed foster parents have reported they were not always provided access to necessary resources and training (e.g., health services, mental health services, and special education services) to adequately provide for children's needs.

Response 2:

Respondent agrees with the finding (see clarification).

Several of the foster care homes in Blythe that were available in 2003-2004 have since adopted children that were placed in their care and voluntarily removed themselves from being an active foster home. There are currently three Licensed Foster Family Homes and one Foster Family Agency home in the City of Blythe.

Due to the limited availability of foster care placements in the City of Blythe, children are sometimes transported outside of the immediate area and at times, out of the entire desert region for placement. Generally these placements are short term while assessing and certifying relatives for placement. Many of the current caregivers located in Blythe are relatives.

With regard to services and resources, this is addressed more fully in response to Finding and Recommendation 4 below. Despite the services that are available, foster parents in the Blythe community do express ongoing concerns about the lack of services and resources for children in placement. They report a lack of training to meet the needs of the children, lack of transportation resources and lack of advanced medical services requiring them to transport for follow up appointments to Loma Linda Medical Center in most instances.

Training for foster parents in the Blythe Community has been minimal. There is some on-line training available; however, caregivers would like training on more advanced topics to assist them to care for the children being placed in their homes. The local Community Colleges do receive funding for foster parent training; however, Palo Verde College has not offered this service to caregivers. DPSS will initiate discussions with Palo Verde College regarding the need for ongoing training for foster parents and pursue the development of this resource for the Blythe community.

Finding 3: Safety Security

At the time of this report, the exterior doors at the Blythe CPS office do not close completely when the staff enters at the back of the building, consequently the alarm system is not always dependable. Although there is lighting in the front of the building, it functions intermittently.

Investigation and inspection of the Blythe CPS office revealed there are two security cameras on the rear of the building. However, the poor resolution and improper placement negates the camera's reliability, making identification of people or vehicles virtually impossible.

Further investigation revealed that vehicles often operate in an unsafe manner within the interior of the parking lot near the CPS entrances utilized for moving children into and out of the facility.

The geographical and physical settings of the office, especially in relation to other county facilities attracts a variety of individuals, including vagrants. The necessary night utilization of the facility, usually involving children, presents a definite security issue.

Response 3:

Respondent disagrees partially with the finding.

The exterior doors, inadequate lighting and security camera issues were referred to County Facilities Management and these issues are in the process of being corrected.

The concern about the parking lot has been addressed with the Landlord and there is a plan to place speed bumps in both the front and rear parking lots.

The CPS location is not isolated from other County programs. The building is currently co-located with Adult Protective Services and adjacent to the DPSS Temporary Assistance Programs office. Additionally, County Department of Mental Health and Family Services of the Desert are also adjacent to the CPS/APS office. The immediate availability of these services in one location allows customers to more readily access the services they need to complete their case plans.

Finding 4: Services

The Blythe CPS social workers and their clients have limited access to local community services and county support systems in the Palo Verde Valley area. These support services are required for individualized intervention to families, which in turn, allow the opportunity for children to be raised in homes free of abuse and neglect. Examples of services required by families through CPS programs include parenting classes, drug treatment and testing, psychotherapy, life skills training services, transportation services and support services to relatives and foster caretakers. Many of these necessary support services are only available at distant locations such as Indio, Riverside or Moreno Valley.

Interviews revealed excessive travel times to receive required services negatively impact social workers' ability to effectively and efficiently manage their caseloads.

Due to minimal staffing levels, the Blythe Office of the Department of Mental Health is only able to respond to emergency CPS referrals. A Mental Health Clinical Therapist is needed to expand mental health services capacity to provide both routine and emergency counseling for CPS clients.

Blythe CPS workers must often travel long distances to receive their required professional training.

In an attempt to coordinate CPS activities, quarterly meetings are currently held between representatives of CPS, Mental Health and Probation Departments. However, these meetings are too infrequent to best meet the needs of the affected families.

Response 4:

Respondent disagrees partially with the finding.

DPSS currently contracts with Family Services of the Desert to provide a range of services to children and families in the Blythe area. These services include parenting, counseling, anger management and domestic violence programs.

The County Department of Mental Health provides out patient mental health services to adults and children to include crisis intervention, individual and group counseling, medication management and a drug court program.

Parents are referred out of the Blythe area for residential substance abuse programs due to a lack of these programs within the Blythe area.

The Department of Mental Health has a full time clinician available to provide the services outlined above Monday through Thursday from 8am-6pm.

Training for Blythe social workers is being offered locally. Social Workers are now provided training opportunities via online courses, web-based courses and DPSS Staff Development Officers providing on-site training. Additionally, a Training Mentor Supervisor has been traveling to the Blythe office one day per month to provide mentoring and training on-site.

The quarterly meetings held between Mental Health, Probation and CPS have been changed to monthly meetings to better address the needs and concerns related to services in the Blythe community.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

DPSS recruit and establish contracts with local licensed facilities to provide temporary shelters for placement of children who are removed from their homes during late evening and early morning hours.

Response 1:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

Beginning in September, the Department's Children's Services Division - Permanency, Placement and Desert Regions will target community events that will outreach to the Blythe community for new foster homes. DPSS' goal is to inform the community of the need for qualified, supportive families willing to care for children who have experienced abuse or neglect from their families. Informational/recruitment meetings will be organized and held with the Blythe Child Abuse Council, community leaders, school administrators and faith based leaders to provide information on the need for foster homes in Blythe and the surrounding area.

As part of the Department's Family to Family program, foster parent recruitment materials have been developed that are distributed through schools. The Department will provide these materials to the schools which can be distributed to students to be taken home to parents.

Current relative caretakers will be contacted and informed of the need in Blythe in an effort to recruit them to become County Licensed Foster Homes. As noted previously, several of the foster care homes in Blythe have since adopted children that were placed in their care and voluntarily removed themselves from being an active foster home. However, DPSS will follow up with former foster parents to confirm that there weren't other reasons for no longer participating and to explore whether they would be open to fostering again.

This targeted recruitment effort will be implemented in early September and will be ongoing for the Department.

Recommendation 2:

DPSS implement a well orchestrated recruitment effort to expand the number of certified foster care homes and shelter care facilities available in the Palo Verde area. Establish new foster care provider contracts and/or re-activate contracts with foster care providers for child placement, with approval of Community Care Licensing in Blythe and Indio.

Response 2:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Department's response to this recommendation is the same as number 1.

Recommendation 3:

Blythe CPS routinely inspect all entrances to ensure the doors properly close and the alarm system functions correctly. Report any maintenance problems to Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) Real Estate Division.

Blythe CPS routinely inspect lighting in both front and rear of the building and report any maintenance problems to Riverside County EDA Real Estate Division.

Blythe CPS ensure that all security cameras are in working condition, DPSS to upgrade and expand coverage of the cameras, and the picture quality, as needed. DPSS place an additional security camera in the front of the building to cover the entrance area of the adjacent parking lot.

DPSS request Riverside County EDA Real Estate Division to contact the property owner to install speed bumps in the back and front parking lots for safety of the employees and children.

Response 3:

The recommendation has been implemented.

The CPS supervisor routinely checks all entrances to the building and ensures the alarms are operating correctly. The rear door has been repaired by County Facilities Management. Any future problems will be reported immediately.

The lighting is inspected by the CPS supervisor to ensure it is operating correctly and immediately reports problems to DPSS Facilities Management. On July 14, 2011, a request was submitted for the Landlord to install additional lights in the front and rear of the building.

DPSS Facilities Manager will regularly inspect security cameras to insure that they are operating correctly. On July 18, 2011, a request was sent and a quote received for replacing the security cameras. Installation of the equipment will be scheduled in the near future.

On July 19, 2011, a request was submitted for the Landlord to order and install speed bumps in both the front and rear parking lots adjacent to the building.

Recommendation 4:

DPSS contract with local educational institutions such as School Districts, Palo Verde College and Local Non-Profit Agencies to obtain needed child and family social services in areas such as parenting classes, drug treatment and life skills training.

DPSS fund a Clinical Therapist position assigned to the Blythe Mental Health Clinic. This position would expand capacity to provide mental health services for adults and minors referred by Blythe CPS.

DPSS conduct required training of Blythe CPS social workers in Blythe, for example, one trainer coming to Blythe to train six or more social workers as opposed to six persons traveling to Indio or Moreno Valley.

Blythe CPS hold monthly meetings between CPS, Mental Health, Probation and other support services deemed appropriate, in order to coordinate the efforts of each department.

Response 4:

The recommendations have been implemented.

Many of the recommended services have been in place and available within the community. DPSS Children's Services Division currently contracts with Family Services of the Desert to provide a range of services. This contract is specific to the Blythe community and includes individual and group counseling, 12-week parenting group, 16-week anger management, 16-week children's services focused child abuse anger management and domestic violence programs.

In addition, the Department of Mental Health provides a Licensed Clinician to provide individual counseling and crisis intervention. The Department of Mental Health also provides a substance abuse counselor to provide substance abuse treatment services. These services are available in the Blythe office Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6pm and include: outpatient mental health treatment for adults, adolescents and children to include assessment, crisis intervention, individual counseling, medication management, case management, referral and consultation.

Currently, there are a number of community agencies that social workers refer families to for intervention and services. These agencies are:

- California Department of Rehabilitation
- Blythe Family Clinic
- Family Service Center
- Blythe Drug Abuse Program
- House of Miracles - substance abuse treatment
- Hopeful Start - substance abuse treatment
- ACES – AA/NA meetings
- METCALF – inpatient substance abuse program for males
- Parent Project – parenting classes' specific to teen years
- Palo Verde College – parenting classes

In an effort to provide training, support and updates to the Blythe Social Services staff, the Division has ensured that a Regional Manager, Office Support Supervisor and a Training Region Supervisor travel to the Blythe office monthly since February 2011. Over the first part of 2011 our Children's Services Staff Development Officers traveled to Blythe to provide specific training on two subject matter areas and efforts are being made to continue providing on-site training to Blythe staff as well as web cast and online courses.

The Children's Services Division has initiated monthly meetings with Mental Health, Probation and local school personnel to ensure coordination of efforts. In addition, the Blythe Children's Services Supervisor attends the following monthly meetings:

Community Youth Intervention – monthly at the Blythe Police Department attended by the School District, Sheriff's Department and Judicial Officers

Blythe Community Luncheon – monthly and facilitated by the School Districts to include Prison Staff, Hospital, Probation, Mental Health and Community members

Prevent Child Abuse Blythe Collaborative - held monthly and attended by community members.

DPSS will initiate discussions with Palo Verde College regarding the need for ongoing training for foster parents in the Blythe community.