Foster Care-Foster Parent Issues

The Grand Jury has looked at various issues regarding Foster Care in 1995–96, 1997–98, 1999–2000, and 2000–2001 and made recommendations. The Department of Social Services (DSS) has adopted many of the recommendations and provided documentation of their implementation to the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury now finds that some of these issues need attention again.

Findings

1. In the 1995–96 Grand Jury Report "Review of Child Protective Services (CPS)" Recommendation 2 stated: "A position for training CPS personnel and foster parents should be established."

   Family and Children's Services (FCS) established positions for foster parent liaison, recruitment, and training, but they have often been vacant. Throughout the County, there are now three Social Worker foster placement positions (one vacant) and a Senior Analyst foster parent recruitment and training person.

2. In the 1997–98 Grand Jury Report "Department of Social Services and Foster Parents," Recommendation 2 stated: "FCS develop and distribute an up-to-date foster parent handbook." FCS developed a new Foster Parent handbook and reported that it had been distributed to Foster Parents.

   Recent witnesses stated that all foster parents have not received handbooks and that other long-term foster parents are not receiving updates to the handbooks.

3. The 1997–98 report Recommendation 3 stated: "CPS should implement the use of a health and education record for foster children." The 2000–2001 Grand Jury report stated that DSS had implemented this and provided a Health and Education Passport notebook. Policy/Procedure Letter 6:99 "Health and Education Passport" states the procedures for use of the notebook.

   At least one foster parent, taking care of a child with special needs, did not get information that should have been included in the Health and Education Passport notebook. The foster parent received the notebook, but it only contained a Medical card. The foster parent updated notebook, but when FCS moved the child to another foster home, the passport notebook did not go with the child. No one from FCS asked for the notebook. In another case, the notebook did not contain information about a child's critical need for therapy services.

   FCS now has nurses responsible for recording medical information and a clerk responsible for getting and recording education information. There

is a sign off sheet for receipt of the Health and Education Passport, but no checklist for any other information FCS gives to a Foster Parent, such the "Shelter Care Placement Progress/Discharge Report," "Placement Evaluation," and the "Needs and Services Plan." There is no sign-off sheet for return of the Health and Education Passport or any other documents.

4. The 1997–98 Report, Recommendation 7 stated: "FCS should hold quarterly meetings between FCS and the Foster Parent Association to provide a forum for mutual communication." FCS responded that they would implement this recommendation.

In 2001–02, the voluntary Foster Parent Association was not functioning and FCS staff could not meet quarterly with the group.

Recommendations

A.   FCS use the Foster Parent Handbook. (Finding 2)

B.   FCS workers accurately record the information needed in the Health and Education Passport notebook. (Finding 3)

C.   FCS provide a checklist for Social Workers so they will know what information they need to get when a child is taken into custody. (Finding 3)

D.   FCS provide a checklist for information that should be given to foster parents upon placement of a child and a checklist for information to be received from the foster parent when a child leaves a home. (Finding 3)

E.   In the absence of a Foster Parent Association, FCS provide another means of communicating necessary information to foster parents. (Finding 4)

Comment

The 2002–03 Grand Jury review the Foster Care program, including foster homes and care of children.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Response Requested

Mendocino County Department of Social Services Director