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**OUTCOMES-BASED DELIVERY OF  
CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS  
IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

**Prepared By:**

Sheryl C. Goldberg, Ph.D  
Amy D'Andrade, B.A.  
Katie Kramer, B.A.  
Paul Buddenhagen, B.A.

Bay Area Social Services Consortium  
Center for Social Services Research  
School of Social Welfare  
University of California, Berkeley

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### **Center for Social Services Research (CSSR)**

The Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) conducts research, policy analysis, program planning and evaluation toward the improvement of the publicly supported social services. Housed in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley, the Center responds to the concerns of community professionals and consumers of services to develop research activities that are practice- and policy-relevant. The focus of the work is on populations that are considered needy or disadvantaged and on support to human service agencies through analysis of agency management, finance, professional development and services systems.

### **Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) Research Response Team**

The Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) was founded in 1987 and is composed of the directors of Bay Area county social service and human service agencies, deans of Bay Area graduate social work departments and foundation representatives. BASSC activities include directing educational programs, conducting applied research and developing social welfare policies. Housed at CSSR, the BASSC Research Response Team was organized in 1995 to respond quickly to the emerging needs of county social service agencies for information about their changing environments. Small-scale research projects are undertaken in close collaboration with agency administrators and program staff.

Please call (510) 642-1899 to request additional copies of this report or other CSSR materials.

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# OUTCOMES-BASED DELIVERY OF CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Introduction*

Many human service agencies are moving towards outcomes-based accountability in both program planning and evaluation. This has been guided in the public sector by various federal legislation including the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, the Government Management Reform Act of 1994 and the Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1996. Additional factors have led to a shift toward outcomes-based accountability including increased scrutiny and pressure on public agencies, increased competition for limited funds and a desire to provide better, more efficient services.

Contra Costa County Social Service Department has been preparing for this movement through various initiatives over the past few years. These initiatives involve: (1) the inclusion of community-wide goals in the budget process beginning with the 1996-97 budget, (2) an outcomes feasibility study regarding the readiness of county programs; (3) a large scale review of the status of management information systems and (4) the development and implementation of an Evaluation Task Force.

In June 1997, the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) of the University of California Berkeley School of Social Welfare received a grant from the Contra Costa County Social Service Department (SSD) to assist the agency in moving towards outcomes-based service delivery. This report provides Contra Costa County administrators and staff with a general methodological framework for developing and collecting outcome data and indicators for change

within any service program. This report also provides Contra Costa County with a specific product to be used in defining, collecting and measuring outcomes in the child welfare program.

### *Outcomes in Child Welfare*

Until recently, much of the data gathered in child welfare agencies related to what kinds of services were provided, and to whom (Fletcher, 1997; Kirk, 1995; Magura & Moses, 1986). These process measurements, while providing important information about an agency, do not convey whether interventions have succeeded in their intent. It is increasingly important that child welfare agencies be able to document the results of their services. By documenting service results for clients, child welfare programs can justify funding, maintain public credibility and improve essential services to children and their families (Schorr, 1995).

There are a number of aspects particular to the field of child welfare that complicate the process of measuring outcomes. First, the multiple goals of a child welfare agency, i.e. child safety, family preservation, permanency planning, etc., make it difficult to arrive at a consensus for desired outcomes (Berrick, Needell, Barth, & Jonson-Reid, 1998). Secondly, there are a myriad of factors influencing a family or client besides the child welfare agency, which can override the effects of agency services. Another challenge can be the data source, as few child welfare agencies have automated case management systems that capture the necessary elements of case information needed to track outcomes (Courtney & Collins, 1994). Considerable staff and resource expenditures need to be made, whether an automated MIS system exists or not (Fletcher, 1997). Other concerns are the lack of control groups against which to make comparisons, and the possible resistance of line staff to an outcomes measurement process. Two final concerns are displacing the primary goal of the agency, child protection, in efforts to meet

other outcomes like family preservation or client satisfaction (Courtney, 1993), and “creaming,” creating a disincentive to work with high-risk families unlikely to achieve the targets (Kirk, 1993).

Beyond these challenges, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration when beginning an outcomes accountability process. First, outcomes can be examined on several levels. They can be gathered on a community-wide basis, on the agency level and on a program specific level. Second, there are a number of issues to consider relating to the analysis of the outcomes information. For example, it may be necessary to combine certain indicators in order to confidently assert a positive outcome. Also, outcomes measure the apparent results of services provided, but alone they will not indicate why the results are the way they are.

Regarding the uses of the outcomes data, it is important to circulate the information to line staff. When line staff see the benefits of outcome data, they have more incentive to be accurate and thorough in their data entry. Outcomes information combined with process measurements provides the analyst or manager with effective tools for program evaluation and adjustment, and eventual improvement in service quality and effectiveness.

### ***Contra Costa County Issues***

Several of these challenges and aspects of outcomes evaluation are considered in relation to Contra Costa County’s Children and Family Services. The first challenge for the county was to identify and define the broad agency outcomes to achieve in child welfare programs. To do this it was important to translate Federal, state and local policy intent into child welfare policy outcomes to meet and be accountable to community expectations. A second challenge was to

identify the ability of the new statewide automated case management system (i.e., CWS/CMS) to meet the data collection demands. While the introduction of CWS/CMS allows ongoing outcomes measurement to be possible for the entire county client population, it also creates serious limitations as indicators of client change are restricted to what is available on the system. Furthermore, this new child welfare data collection system is still in the implementation stage in the county and may not provide all of the indicator data needed to measure critical outcomes.

Other major factors to consider are the resources that will be required to implement and institutionalize the outcomes framework; the creation of baseline or comparison data; line staff concerns; and the avoidance of goal displacement or creaming, given the potential linkage of outcomes with the county budget.

### ***Presentation of Outcomes Model***

The general framework for measuring outcomes consists of community goals, agency goals, service outcomes and performance indicators. Community goals are ideally framed by the various stakeholders in the agency. Agency goals are the basic, broad goals for addressing the needs or clients of the agency. Performance indicators are measurable data that indicate to what degree the outcomes have been met or at least the best proxy possible (Schorr, 1995). The outcomes measurement model developed for Contra Costa County is presented in the following tables. When it appears that information related to the indicator is available on a standard CWS/CMS report or in the CWRC Performance Indicators Annual Report, the report number is included in the Data Source section. Reports marked with an asterisk appear to provide exact performance indicator data. Other reports have data that appears related, but does not exactly capture the indicator as written.

**Table 1: Contra Costa County Child Welfare Programs: Outcomes Model**

**SAFETY**

<b>Community Goal</b>	<b>Agency Goal</b>	<b>Service Outcome</b>	<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Sources of Related Data</b>
I. Improve the health and safety of children and families	A. Children who have been involved with CWS are safe	1. Children referred to CWS are safe	a. % of referrals screened out at hotline that do not have subsequent substantiated allegations within 3 months  b. % referrals investigated, and then closed that do not have subsequent substantiated allegations within 3 months	CWS/CMS Report: PM-COWPC
		2. Children active to the system are safe	a. % active cases with no additional substantiated allegations  b. % of active cases in which there is an additional substantiated allegations by perpetrator type: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parent</li> <li>- Non-relative substitute care provider</li> <li>- Relative substitute care provider</li> </ul>	CWS/CMS Report: PM-REABUS
		3. Children remain safe in their homes upon termination of services	a. % children reunified with their parents who have no subsequent substantiated allegations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 months after case closure</li> <li>- 12 months after case closure</li> </ul> b. % children adopted who have no subsequent substantiated allegations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within 6 months after adoptive placement finalized</li> <li>- within 12 months after adoptive placement finalized</li> </ul> c. % children in guardianship who have no subsequent substantiated allegations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 months after guardianship established</li> <li>- 12 months after guardianship established</li> </ul>	CWS/CMS Report: PM-COWPC  Perf. Ind. Report: Table 7.1

## FAMILY PRESERVATION

Community Goal	Agency Goal	Service Outcome	Performance Indicator	Sources of Related Data
<p>I. Improve the health and safety of children and families</p>	<p><b>B. Families are preserved</b></p>	<p>1. Children remain in their own homes whenever possible.</p>	<p>a. % of cases active to the system that are receiving Family Maintenance Services</p> <p>b. % of Voluntary Services cases that do not transfer to Court Ordered services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within 6 months</li> <li>- within 12 months</li> </ul> <p>c. % of Voluntary Services cases that did transfer to Court Ordered services, in which the child is placed in out-of-home care</p>	<p>CWS/CMS Report: PM-FMREMR</p>
		<p>2. Family and cultural ties are maintained for children who must be placed out of the home</p>	<p>a. % of children with siblings in out-of-home care who are placed with at least one sibling</p> <p>b. % of children in out-of-home care who are placed with relative care providers</p>	<p>CWS/CMS Report: PM-SIBPLC</p> <p>CWS/CMS Report: PM-OHPFC</p> <p>Perf. Ind. Report: Table 4.2</p> <p>CWS/CMS Report: PM-OHCNRP</p>

## PERMANENCE

Community Goal	Agency Goal	Service Outcome	Performance Indicator	Sources of Related Data
I. Improve the health and safety of children and families	C. Children achieve permanent stable homes	1. Children achieve permanence in a timely manner	a. % of children in out-of-home care reunified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within 6 months</li> <li>- within 12 months</li> <li>- within 18 months</li> <li>- within 3 years</li> </ul> b. % of children in out-of-home care who are placed for adoption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within 6 months</li> <li>- within 12 months</li> <li>- within 18 months</li> <li>- within 3 years</li> </ul> c. % of children in out-of-home care who transfer to guardianship care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within 6 months</li> <li>- within 12 months</li> <li>- within 18 months</li> <li>- within 3 years</li> </ul>	CWS/CMS Reports: FC 1520 FC 1541 FC 1570  Perf. Ind. Report: Table 8.3
		2. Placements are stable	a. % of children in out-of-home care with < 3 placements prior to permanence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relative care</li> <li>- foster home</li> <li>- FFA</li> <li>- group home</li> </ul> b. % of LTFC children with < 3 placements at case closure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relative care</li> <li>- foster home</li> <li>- FFA</li> <li>- group home</li> </ul> c. % of permanent placements intact at 2 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adoption</li> <li>- guardianship</li> <li>- reunification</li> </ul> d. % of LTFC placements intact at 2 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relative care provider</li> <li>- non-relative care provider</li> </ul>	CWS/CMS Reports: FC 1543* FC 1585 PM- PLACRT  Perf. Ind. Report: Table 9.1
		3. Children live in the least restrictive environment possible	a. % of children in out-of-home care in each placement category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relative care</li> <li>- foster home</li> <li>- FFA</li> <li>- group home</li> </ul>	CWS/CMS Report: PM-OHPFC* FC 1581*  Perf. Ind. Report: Table 4.2*

## HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Community Goal	Agency Goal	Service Outcome	Performance Indicator	Sources of Related Data
I. Improve the health and safety of children and families	D. Children's developmental needs are being met	1. Children's physical health needs are being met	a. % of children active to the system receiving annual CHDP exams b. % of children active to the system receiving annual dental exams c. % of children active to the system with current health passport	CWS/CMS Report: PM-MDW30D
		2. Children's mental health needs are being met	a. % of children in out-of-home care placed in RCL 13/14 facilities b. % of children in out-of-home care psychiatrically hospitalized	CWS/CMS Report: PM-OHPFC
		3. Children's educational needs are being met	a. % of children active to the system with regular school attendance b. % of children active to the system with documented, individualized education plan c. % of emancipating youth who graduated from high school or have GED	CWS/CMS Report: SOC405

## CLIENT SATISFACTION

Community Goal	Agency Goal	Service Outcome	Performance Indicator	Sources of Related Data
I. Improve the health and safety of children and families	E. Client satisfaction	1. Clients will be satisfied with the services they receive	a. % clients completing survey upon case closure who are satisfied with service** b. % of clients currently receiving service who completed survey and reported satisfaction with service**  ** disaggregated by district and service areas	Not applicable

This model does a number of things well. First, using CWS/CMS as the sole source allows for the collection of outcomes data with minimal impact on line staff, and enables examination of the entire population of clients served. The indicators for the primary child welfare goals of safety, family preservation and permanence allow for adequate measurement of the outcomes, and several indicators support most outcomes. Use of the framework will enable the creation of baseline data against which future years' progress can be measured. Some of the information is readily available off standardized CWS/CMS reports and the annual "Performance Indicators for Child Welfare in California" report distributed by the Child Welfare Research Center at UC Berkeley. And finally, given that the other California counties will be using the same computer system, the potential for meaningful comparisons exists. Application of this outcomes framework will enable Contra Costa County to take an important step towards outcomes-based service delivery.

There are some areas in the model which need further attention and improvement. Using CWS/CMS as a sole data source limits available indicators and, in some cases, forces the use of indicators which are relatively poor measurements of the outcomes. Given the recent introduction of the automated case management system to the county, some amount of data entry error by staff can be expected. Additionally, staff consistently do not enter some data that this model assumes to be present. Because CWS/CMS is limited to California, data for families who leave the state and enter a child protective service system elsewhere will not be captured. Finally, this model does not systematically incorporate inputs or processes into its framework, the examination of which would be necessary for program evaluation or service adjustment;

however, it certainly does not preclude the examination of such data gathered from CWS/CMS or other sources.

### ***Summary and Next Steps***

Contra Costa County has initiated a movement towards outcomes-based service delivery in Child and Family Services. The application of the outcomes framework presented here will allow the county to gain a better understanding of what their services are actually accomplishing in terms of enhancing child safety, preserving families and supporting stable permanent homes for children.

The creation of this outcomes model is a first step for the county in its move towards adopting an outcomes-based service delivery model in not only child welfare but other programs as well. Further actions will need to be taken to implement the model and maintain the process. Following are some next steps for the county to take toward this goal in addition to some broader recommendations for action.

#### **Step One: Ensure adequate administrative support and community resources for implementation of outcomes framework**

An assessment of the administrative resources available should be undertaken, to determine whether current staff are able to incorporate the new tasks associated with outcomes measurement into their workloads or if new positions need to be created and filled. There needs to be adequate systems staff available to support this outcomes framework, to gather the data and to provide technical assistance. Staff will be needed to develop a client satisfaction instrument, train social workers, provide compliance supervision, analyze data and report results. The

complexity and variety of the work suggest that a central person should be assigned the task of coordinating and managing the effort.

Additionally, without adequate resource support in the community, agency outcomes will be disappointing. Adequate numbers of effective and accessible organizations providing substance abuse treatment, counseling, parent training, etc. are required for the agency to fulfill its mission of protecting children and preserving families. Prior to implementation of the framework, the agency may wish to assess the availability of such resources in the community. Outcome results also may indicate where more resources are needed.

**Step Two: Complete and enhance implementation of CWS/CMS**

The county will need to complete the implementation of the CWS/CMS system, and insure that key staff, such as the systems analyst, receive necessary training on collecting outcomes data. Additionally, if healthy child development is an outcome the county is interested in measuring, line staff will need to begin inputting the relevant information regarding this outcome. Adjustments in their workloads may be required to support line staff in this effort.

**Step Three: Look at client outcomes by ethnicity, age and region.**

Important differences in outcomes by ethnicity, location and age generally exist in child welfare agencies. Understanding these kinds of differences and their existence in the county is one of the primary benefits of an outcomes measurement model.

**Step Four: Develop client satisfaction survey instrument**

It remains important to develop some kind of client satisfaction survey, as this outcome has no indicators available on the CWS/CMS system. Two samples, from Kansas and Utah, are attached in Appendix B and should supply some guidance. In this area, it may be most useful to

tailor the survey to specific services. In order to conserve resources, it may also be advisable to select a sample of clients and use a written or telephone questionnaire. Focus groups or surveying the entire client population may prove to be too costly. Additionally, the agency may need to assess the goal within a broader context. Client satisfaction could incorporate the parent/foster parent/other caregiver, the child and the community (e.g., court, police and schools).

**Step Five: Adapt framework to smaller service areas, such as Emergency Response services or Independent Living Skills services, in order to evaluate programs and improve service delivery**

After implementing the outcomes framework at the agency-wide level, it will be useful to examine smaller, core service areas within Child and Family Services as well. The process that was used to develop the agency-wide framework can be applied to the development of goals, outcomes and indicators for individual service areas. It is important that staff within each service component participate in this process. This will take some level of effort to complete the model in the major services areas—but the payoff is that the county can assess actual program variables and make adjustments to improve services. Also necessary for this kind of program evaluation is the careful analysis of process measurements, including inputs (client, community and agency characteristics) and outputs (characteristics of actual services provided) in addition to the outcomes. Much of the service level data are available from the CWS/CMS database.

**Step Six: Redesign contracts with private providers to complement the outcomes model**

Those agencies that contract with the county to provide services to families should be monitored to ensure their activities and goals complement and support this outcomes framework.

The model can be adapted to specifically address the intent and activities of these outside programs, as it can for smaller service areas within the Department. Outcomes produced by the program could be taken into consideration when contracts are reviewed for renewal. However, it is important to remember that it will take some time to establish a baseline, and decisions about contract renewals should not be based solely on outcomes data.

**Step Seven: Provide training on outcomes to social work staff**

It will be critical to obtain line staff support and understanding of the process of measuring outcomes. All information regarding outcomes must be collected and entered into the system by line staff. If they are not invested in the process, they have little incentive to input information as thoroughly and carefully as necessary. There are numerous benefits to using outcomes possible to line staff. It will be important to provide general training on the concept of outcomes evaluation to line staff to help them see the benefits of participation. Staff could be given training on the specific data fields required on CWS/CMS, such as where they are located in the database and how to complete them. Additionally, training on collecting outcome data, data analysis and interpretation, and modifying practice based on strong findings related to outcomes will be necessary for the appropriate administrative staff.

**Step Eight: Solicit the input and concurrence of additional stakeholders on this methodology**

The county may want to involve more stakeholders as they continue to refine their indicators and the outcomes framework. Community service providers, client advocates, other county departments providing services to the same population and agency staff representatives will be able to contribute to discussions regarding the appropriate outcomes to which Children

and Family Services should be held accountable. Their participation will lend validity to the outcomes selected. However, as other stakeholders may have differing priorities, it is important for the department to be careful to select only those outcomes over which it has some significant degree of control, and which are within the purview of its overall mission.

### **Statewide Considerations**

Following are some recommendations for action related to other counties and statewide considerations.

**Recommendation One:      Work with other California counties and the State to develop a common framework for outcome measurement that conforms to the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act**

With the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, a national system of outcomes is planned, and states will be required to report certain outcomes annually to the federal government. The state should be working with counties to clarify its expectations, and provide guidance and financial support for this new endeavor. Counties may want to collaborate to adopt similar outcomes and definitions. While counties differ greatly in terms of the populations served and county characteristics, it will still be informative and helpful to be able to compare outcomes among them.

**Recommendation Two:      Work closely with other counties, the state and the CWS/CMS contractor to bring the CWS/CMS system to full functionality, and also to incorporate useful indicators not currently available in the system into the ongoing changes and adjustments to the database**

The CWS/CMS system is still unstable, and counties therefore have little confidence in the data, and are reluctant to enforce data entry among their staff. Achieving system functionality, stability and reliability is critical for this outcomes measurement system to be meaningful.

**Recommendation Three: The county should share its experience with outcomes based methodology with the state and the CWS/CMS contractor to incorporate these additional data elements when necessary into the evolving system.**

As the county becomes familiar with both the CWS/CMS system and the outcomes framework over time, it will be important to revisit the selected indicators to be sure they are capturing the best information available on the system to measure the outcomes intended. Changes that would improve outcome measurement should be accorded high priority status by the contractor. Additionally, the county should work with the subgroup formed to make changes and improvements to the CWS/CMS reports. Obviously, if the CWS/CMS reports could be adjusted to gather this information specifically and in the correct time frames, additional queries to the database would be unnecessary.