

Developing Inter-agency Collaboration

How do we **ensure** the safety, permanency and well-being of **vulnerable children**?



As California implements Continuum of Care Reform for Child Welfare, access to child care services has become an identified barrier to effective placements particularly with relative caregivers and resource families. Currently, the only option for child care services is through the existing general child care system. This system has extremely limited resources to serve a wide array of child care needs, not just the Child Welfare population, and is completely full with long waiting lists for services. This causes delays even though Child Welfare families have priority to access available spaces.

Moreover, the Child Care Resource Center's (CCRC) research found that Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) staff predominantly made six or more attempts before being able to place a young child. To address this barrier and try to overcome some of the emergency child care needs to facilitate placements, CCRC and DCFS are developing a pilot program with the following components:

- Funding for child care for resource parents (e.g., foster parents, relatives, non-relative extended family) willing to care for children birth to 5 years old
- Professional development and training in trauma-informed care (TIC) for child care providers
- Child care navigators to match the resource family with the child care provider and navigate Child Welfare and Early Care and Education (ECE) systems to achieve the goals of safety, permanence, and well-being for the child
- System for regular communication between ECE and Child Welfare
- Research to demonstrate the need, outcomes, and policy implications



Research conducted with DCFS staff, resource parents, and child care providers revealed the following challenges that must be addressed:

1) **Accessibility to and Clarity of DCFS Child Care Information**

- Difficulty acquiring information about available child care support
- Unclear, fragmented information
- Lengthy eligibility determination and service connection processes

A resource parent was told that child care costs would not be covered for foster parents and then was given conflicting information that child care costs would be covered – this inconsistent information leaves resource parents confused and unsure about who to turn to for help.



2) **Affordability of Child Care**

- Affordability/cost of child care
- Limited access to subsidized child care
- Care for a child with special needs (e.g., medication, training)

Missing work may increase the financial burden on resource parents, "He has to work and for a month he hasn't been able to work because he can't find proper child care because he doesn't have the funding."



A DCFS employee commenting about the process of child care approval, "[U]ntil we can get approved or reviewed for approval, we'll advise them to go down to DPSS and apply for money to be caregivers, so there's a lot of initial out of pocket expenses that they have."

A resource parent commented, "[W]e're getting like \$700 for the placement we have now, so okay, so if all of that goes to child care, then we're still supplementing it, which is not a big deal but, you're constantly thinking that through, like ok and all that money that we're getting we can't spend on her, we can't buy her clothes with that, we can't buy her diapers with that, 'cause we're spending it all on child care."



3) Establishing/Refining Regulations and Policies

- Long child care waitlists or inability to access waitlists for subsidized care due to lack of funding

A resource parent commented, "[W]e've reached out to places [child care providers], most of them wanted to put us on a waitlist that could be up to like 9 months."



- Lengthy child care provider approval process
- Lack of resources/services in language other than English
- Lack of flexibility in hours that child care is available or approved for subsidy

If a resource parent works in industries with non-traditional hours [retail, medical, hospitality], requiring a set schedule will pose a significant barrier.



- Assisting biological parents with child care upon reunification to ensure stability and continuity of care
- Child care often does not fit with resource parent needs (flexible hours, transportation, location)

4) Support and Resources for Providers

- Provider financial challenges

One provider spoke about how she gladly helped a struggling parent who had no transportation by going beyond her responsibilities and getting his children ready for school, dressing them, feeding them, and driving them to and from school, because it was critical for the children's well-being.



- Child care providers lack of knowledge to address the particular needs of young children who have experienced trauma, i.e., how to effectively deal with traumatized children, aggressive parents, and the 'spill-over' effect for the other children in care; TIC training; proper administration of medication; specialized care for children with special needs

How You Can Help

1) Increase availability of information on how to obtain child care and reduce barriers to accessing child care!

- > Expedite 30-day approval process for providers
- > Child Care Navigator to help resource parents identify, and, when possible, obtain and maintain child care
- > Alternative methods to deal with long waitlists – increase available funding, navigator, hold slots
- > Information in language(s) other than English is available through Resource and Referral agencies for child care and can be a resource for DCFS and resource parents
- > Child Care Navigator to ensure child safety and permanency by helping biological parents with child care after reunification
- > Flexibility in hours for child care – no requirement of set schedules

2) Increase affordability of child care!

- > Back pay to fully cover child care expenses
- > Have eligibility for child care funding follow the child, not the parent to ensure safety and permanency upon reunification with biological parent

3) Provide necessary support and resources for providers!

- > Specialized training in TIC; effectively dealing with parents and social workers; administering medication; workshops, and support groups
- > Quality stipends for child care providers, i.e., providing transportation, clothing, diapers, food; training costs



This project has been made possible with generous support provided by:



THE
RALPH M. PARSONS
FOUNDATION

W. M. KECK FOUNDATION

County of Los Angeles
Department of Children and Family Services



an anonymous
donor