

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Child Welfare In Humboldt: Getting the Door Open

Report Date: 06/16/2017

Response by: Connie Beck, Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Director

FINDINGS

1. DHHS-CWS disagrees wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F3, and F4.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendation numbered R6 has been implemented.
2. Recommendations numbered R1, R2, R3 and R4 will not be implemented because they are not warranted.
3. Recommendation numbered R5 has not yet been fully implemented, but will be implemented in the near future.

Date: 7-25-17

Signed: 

Number of pages attached: _____

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY STATEMENT

Findings

F1.

Humboldt County Child Welfare Services is not meeting the 24 hour response requirement of their “Callbacks to Mandated and Non-mandated Reporters - Plan & Procedure #09-12,” which could place children at risk.

Partially disagree

DHHS-CWS acknowledges that the community conveyed to the Humboldt County Grand Jury their concerns regarding delays, inefficiencies, and obstacles in the DHHS-CWS Emergency Response (ER) procedure. It is understandable that these issues generated mistrust of DHHS-CWS among some of our system partners and community members. The department is committed to making these changes.

Starting in February 2017, screeners/social workers started answering all calls received by the Hotline, instead of having those calls answered by clerical staff who then took a message for the screener/social worker to call the reporter back. As a result there are no callbacks to any reporters (mandated or non-mandated). This process applies to all calls received during business hours and after hours. A call tree was also put in place to assist CWS in triaging and assigning Hotline calls during business hours, and there is an on-call team consisting of three social workers who respond to calls after hours. With the changes to the system implemented in February 2017, the department began using an electronic spreadsheet as an interim tracking tool. More recently, the DHHS Information Services (IS) unit developed and implemented call-tracking software to assist social worker screeners in tracking all calls that are received and processed. This procedure ensures that DHHS-CWS provides efficient supervision and oversight in regards to Hotline activity and follow through.

F2.

Humboldt County Child Welfare Services does not track the critical time between a report of child endangerment from Mandated Reporters and its return call to that reporter as a part of its overall performance related to response time.

Disagree

See response to F1.

F3.

Humboldt County Child Welfare Services collects no information on its overall performance related to response time to Mandated Reporters, and follow-up communication is severely lacking.

Partially Disagree

Prior to 2017, DHHS-CWS used a paper-system to track the status of calls received. The department acknowledges that this process was ineffective.

With the changes to the system implemented in February 2017, the department began using an electronic spreadsheet as an interim tracking tool. More recently, IS has developed tracking software that compiles data regarding all calls placed to the Hotline (including whether the caller is a mandated reporter). DHHS-

CWS uses this information to ensure that screeners/social workers and investigators/social workers follow best practices regarding third party collateral contacts.

In addition, DHHS-CWS has contracted with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to provide training for intake social workers and for assistance in revising all of CWS' ER policies and procedures.

F4.

In February 2017, Humboldt County Child Welfare Services told the HCCGJ that they have changed their Intake Process by removing the screener and the Intake Form (A-14-30), and connecting the caller directly to a Social Worker. The HCCGJ has no confirmation that this really has happened or, if it has, that these procedures have resulted in any improvement.

Disagree

All screeners/social workers responsible for taking the initial statements from individuals that call the Hotline to report child abuse and/or neglect are trained social workers.

There is no question that members of the community experienced frustration when working with DHHS-CWS. The department's disagreement with these Humboldt County Grand Jury findings is in no way intended to invalidate or undermine these criticisms. Nonetheless, it is not clear why the Humboldt County Grand Jury "has no confirmation" that the system changes implemented in February 2017 are in place as (1) the information was clearly communicated to the Humboldt County Grand Jury by multiple, reliable county officials, and (2) DHHS-CWS has received feedback from almost all of our community partners that the new procedures are working.

DHHS-CWS administration takes this opportunity to applaud the efforts of all of the social workers, supervisors, IS staff, and program managers who committed long hours to developing a new response system. In addition, DHHS-CWS thanks the office of the California Attorney General for assisting DHHS-CWS to make fundamental positive changes to the ER procedure.

Recommendations

R1.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) develop and maintain a "timeliness" metric for measuring their response time once a suspected child abuse/neglect event has been reported and until the caller is notified of receipt of report.

Will not be implemented

The recommended metric is not applicable to the system that has been in place since February 2017. DHHS-CWS intends to maintain its focus on collaborating with the office of the California Attorney General and NCCD to update its procedures and ensure that DHHS-CWS uses Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools effectively and appropriately to protect children.

R2.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services add the timeliness metric discussed in R1 into its Child Welfare Services' System Improvement Plan 2012-2017, and monitor the metric to ensure an acceptable level of timeliness.

Will not be implemented

See response to R1 above.

R3.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) develop a “community performance” metric that measures how Mandated Reporters judge DHHS as successfully supporting the safety of our children.

Will not be implemented

With input from the California Attorney General, and no later than December 2017, DHHS-CWS intends to designate a community task force or work group that will receive feedback from community partners and can monitor the department’s compliance with the new ER process.

R4.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services add the community performance metric discussed in R3 into its Child Welfare Services’ System Improvement Plan 2012-2017, and monitor the performance over time.

Will not be implemented

See response to R3 above.

R5.

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services update its Intake Policies and Procedures to reflect the changes reported to us during our February discussion.

Has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the near future

DHHS-CWS is contracting with NCCD to review and revise our policies and procedures. We expect the materials to be finalized by the end of December 2017.

R6.

Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that Child Welfare Services closely assess the qualifications and training of staff dealing with intake calls, as well as providing the proper supervision to ensure competency.

Is being implemented

DHHS-CWS has contracted with NCCD to provide training to social workers, supervisors, and management in the use of the SDM tools, implementation of case consultation, group supervision and coaching, and review of policies and procedures. DHHS-CWS has already implemented a new process for receiving reports as described in F1. Staff has already received training on the new process.

Additional training on SDM is scheduled to occur from the end of June through September 2017.