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## FOSTER CARE

### BACKGROUND:

In 1825 states enacted laws giving social-welfare agencies the right to remove neglected and abused children from their parents and from the streets. These children were placed in almshouses, orphanages and with other families. In 1835 the Humane Society founded the National Federation of Child Rescues agencies modeled after existing animal protection organizations. These were developed to investigate reports of child maltreatment, present cases in court and advocate for child welfare legislation.

In 1974, the “Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act” (P.L. 93-247) provided federal funds for wide-ranging federal and state child-maltreatment research and services.

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors oversees Child Welfare Services. Child Welfare Services include the Public Health Department, the Mental Health Department, Regional Centers, Probation Department and some community based-agencies.

### REASON FOR INVESTIGATION:

Children’s health and welfare are a vital concern in Tulare County. The Grand Jury sought information on how the Child Welfare Services, previously called Child Protective Services, determines placement, how tracking is conducted and who is accountable for monitoring the available services.

### PROCEDURES FOLLOWED:

1. Interviewed relevant witnesses
2. Researched relevant documents
3. Attended community conferences

### FACTS:

1. A person may call Child Welfare Services Hotline, (800-331-1585) 24-hours a day to report a possible abused or neglected child.
2. Foster care parent requirements include the following:
  - Be 18 years of age or older
  - Be financially self-supporting
  - Receive a criminal record clearance and have no criminal record involving violent crimes or crimes against children
  - Obtain a CPR and First Aid certification
  - Have a home that meets basic safety requirements
  - Complete the nine week course of Parent Resources for Information Development & Education Training (PRIDE).
3. A child is removed from a home if the child is in immediate danger or has been severely injured.

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## TULARE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 2013-2014

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4. Law enforcement and Child Welfare Services may interview a child to determine the allegation of child abuse or neglect.
5. During fiscal year 2012 / 2013 in Tulare County, 53.24% of children in foster care were Hispanic, 39.33% were white and 4.48% were Black.
6. During fiscal year 2012 / 2013 in Tulare County, 39.67% of children in foster care were zero to five years of age, 18.87% were six to nine, 19.77% were ten to fourteen and 21.6% were fifteen and older.
7. In Tulare County during fiscal year 2012 / 2013, 18% of foster children were in care for less than one year, 37% of placements were in place between twelve and twenty-four months and 67% were in care for twenty-four months or longer.
8. Tulare County had twenty- six youth on formal probation and eight youth on informal probation in foster care.
9. Under Tulare County Probation Regulations Division 31, §31.320, Subsection .414; Probation is required to visit youth in out of home placement once a month.
10. Children are referred to the foster care system by the Court, which receives a recommendation from the Probation Department after a thorough investigation into the lives of the youth.
11. In 2012 Tulare County Probation Department records show that twenty-six minors received dispositions of group home, foster home or suitable relative.
12. In 2013 Tulare County Probation Department records show that twenty-three minors received dispositions of group home, foster home or suitable relative.
13. Once the child is ward of Tulare County Child Welfare Services, a series of steps are taken on a case by case basis to determine placement, programs and a strategy towards family unification if there is kinship participating.
14. A team is developed which may include the social worker, Team Decision Making facilitator, the parent, the child and the foster parent, therapist, clergyman and any other person who is felt may contribute to a team decision for the child's best interest. This provides for practice transparency and serves as the eyes ears, support and care of the Child Welfare System. This team is comprised of those individuals who care most for the child's future success. This team determines what goals and objectives are in the best interest of the child after it is determined the child can no longer remain in the home. Programs and services available are selected as a group as needed for the child.
15. The Team Decision Making theory is new and successful in the communities' efforts to work collaboratively towards the same goals towards family unification as it emulates the "raising its children together" or "it takes a village" concept. Tulare was the 27th county to implement this program. There are several programs and services available such as Displaced Family Support, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Domestic Violence, Health, Counseling, Early Childhood Mental Health Services to name a few.
16. Notable is a new innovative law, known as Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12) which was placed into law on January 1, 2012. This law allows for otherwise emancipated 18 year old foster children to remain under the court's jurisdiction and participate in an independent living opportunity. This is a funded program affording the "non-minor dependent" up to the age of twenty-one, time to develop skills needed for their future.

17. Foster children have the right to stay in their own school. Rather than make a child change school when moved to a new home, the foster parent is responsible for getting the child to his/her own school.
18. A foster child has a right to attend a church of his/her own religion. It is a responsibility of the foster parent to make sure church attendance is available.

**FINDINGS:**

1. There are several instances where a child becomes the responsibility of the county and a placement determination is needed. There are situations where the child may be a victim of physical child abuse. From time to time the child may be a victim of general child neglect. Other times, a child may be subjected to emotional abuse. On occasion, children become the victims of sexual abuse. There are even situations where the caregiver was absent or incapacitated. Ultimately, all these cases end up in the Child Welfare System.
2. Child Welfare and Probation Departments both have the objective of family unification as a pre-placement goal within one year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. None

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. None