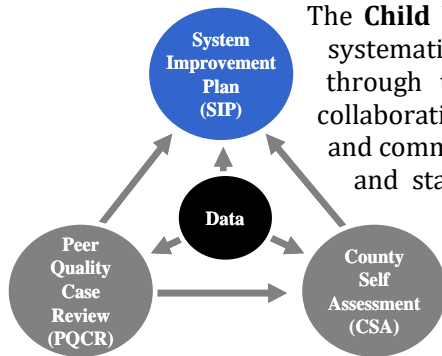


**Sonoma County Human Services Department
Sonoma County Probation Department
2018 County Self-Assessment**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The **Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation County Self-Assessment (CSA)** is a systematic approach to examine the strengths and challenge areas from prevention through the continuum of foster care. The assessment process, which is a collaborative process of the county and its stakeholders, includes analyses of agency and community indicators of child and family well-being; performance in all federal and state outcome areas; policy, procedural and systemic factors that affect county performance; and the availability of resources. The CSA also includes a **Peer Review** intended to provide counties with issue-specific, qualitative, case-level information gathered by external peer experts.

The findings and themes that emerge during the CSA process serve as the foundation for the **System Improvement Plan (SIP)**. The SIP acts as the county’s roadmap for system improvements for the next five years. It also serves as the operational agreement between the county and the state in the local implementation of strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes of children and their families. This report forms the basis of the Sonoma County 2019-2024 System Improvement Plan.

County Self-Assessment Process

Sonoma County used a participative model for its CSA. The 2018 County Self-Assessment process included 2 large community meetings and 18 focus groups. There were a wide variety of child welfare and probation stakeholders who participated in the County Self-Assessment process including child welfare and probation staff, former and current foster youth, parents, resource families, public and private agencies, community based organizations, Indian Child Welfare experts representing local Native American tribes, prevention partners, California Department of Social Services and others. The methodology included quantitative analysis of the county’s performance in key target outcome areas and qualitative analysis of stakeholder input on county strengths and challenges in all aspects of the child welfare and probation systems.

Stakeholder Identified Strengths and Challenges

County staff, clients and the community identified the following overarching themes as strengths and challenges of the child welfare and juvenile probation systems:

Child Welfare

1. Family, Youth and Children’s (FY&C) Division effectively promotes use of kinship care and actively recruits families, yet there are not enough resource families to meet the need for placement, especially for youth with complex or specialized needs.
2. Robust array of quality services and supports for children, youth & families involved with FY&C, yet barriers to accessibility compromise enrollment and ongoing participation (e.g., wait lists for behavioral health and shortage of Spanish speaking service providers).
3. Family-centered teaming is helping increase involvement of families and their support networks; the time is right for more advanced approaches.
4. While there are many dedicated, resilient, creative staff within FY&C workforce, persistent pressures on existing personnel to cover for high staff vacancy rate is taking a toll.
5. More ongoing training, on-the-job coaching and mentoring is needed for staff to build their knowledge, skills and capacity as practitioners and leaders.



6. Dedicated Recruitment & Support Unit and quality resources set solid foundation for caregiver development, yet busy families struggle to absorb it all.
7. Recent practice improvements are positive yet need more active efforts to create and sustain the organizational conditions for these practices to thrive.
8. Infrastructure and system issues compromise the best efforts of the workforce to implement trauma-informed, strength-based, family-centered practice.
9. Launching ICWA Roundtable and Active Efforts Workgroup are promising; yet there is a clear need to uphold ICWA requirements at the individual case level.
10. Strong focus on language accommodations for Spanish-speaking clientele, yet more elusive aspects of cultural competency need attention.
11. Strong prevention services exist; need to connect more families with these resources before issues escalate to levels that may require placement.
12. Psychotropic medication management has greatly improved due to strategies applied from previous System Improvement Plan, yet Behavioral Health service delivery gaps remain.
13. Strong reliance on educational liaison role yet need to broaden responsibility across case management team (social worker, resource family, supervisor, educators) for meeting educational goals of all youth in care.

Probation

1. While diversion and better assessments have resulted in fewer Probation youth in need of placement, those who do can rarely be served locally.
2. Robust array of quality services and supports for Probation youth and families, yet barriers to accessibility compromise enrollment and ongoing participation.
3. Probation Officers and support staff have positive, effective communications with families, but need to better engage families in goal setting, skill-building and case decisions.
4. Recent practice improvements are positive yet need more active efforts to create and sustain the organizational conditions for these practices to thrive.
5. Strong efforts to grow bi-lingual services and supports, yet system adaptations to embrace culturally diversity slower to happen.
6. While strategies are improving the behavioral health service gap for Probation, attention is needed in several areas to improve behavioral health outcomes.
7. Need to leverage the central role schools play throughout youth's involvement in Probation from school enrollment decisions to planning for meeting educational goals.
8. Statewide policy changes limit use of congregate care to short-term therapeutic stays aimed at permanency, which pushes current system to reinvent itself.

Conclusions

Sonoma County has a long history of providing high-quality child welfare and juvenile probation services to children, youth, families and the community. Social workers and probation officers develop and maintain strong relationships with their clients and go above and beyond to ensure their well-being. The Human Services and Probation Departments provide a diverse and plentiful array of effective prevention and treatment services and have strong partnerships in the community. Yet, for myriad reasons outlined in this report, there are areas that should be addressed in order to better serve and improve outcomes for the children and families they serve.

Since the County Self-Assessment, the Human Services and Probation Departments continued to engage stakeholders in identifying effective strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for the individuals they service. The SIP will build on the strengths identified in the 2018 CSA and provide evidence-informed solutions to the barriers and challenges it outlines. The California Department of Social Services Department approved Sonoma County's prioritization of activities on December 13, 2019.