

## **Child Protective Services**

### **Reason for the report**

The 2003/2004 Grand Jury received a complaint about inconsistent application of policies and procedures in Child Protective Services (CPS) and decided to review the 2001/2002 Health and Social Services Committee report. As a result of this review a general investigation of CPS was made.

### **Scope of the investigation**

#### **People interviewed**

- Auditor-Controller
- Chairman of the 2001/2002 Grand Jury Health and Social Services Committee
- CPS Program Managers
- CPS Supervisor
- Current and former CPS employees
- Department of Social Services Accountant
- Director, Department of Human Services
- El Dorado County Judicial Commissioner
- Former acting Director of Human Resources
- Former Assistant Director, Department of Social Services
- Former Director, Department of Social Services

#### **Documents reviewed**

- 2001/2002 Grand Jury report
- CPS manual

#### **Sites visited**

- CPS, Placerville
- CPS, South Lake Tahoe

### **Background**

The 2001/2002 Grand Jury identified significant deficiencies in CPS. The current Grand Jury reviewed the responses to the report, and then conducted interviews to determine if changes had been made, and if the changes corrected the deficiencies.

The investigation revealed that many of the negative issues in the prior Grand Jury report have been addressed and corrected. The Grand Jury was helped by the cooperation of employees in CPS.

## **Facts**

1. There is no ongoing training between CPS and the local law enforcement agencies.
2. On the job training was the only type of training observed by the Grand Jury in CPS.
3. Supervisors do not complete evaluations or provide feedback on probationary personnel on a regular basis.
4. Communication among management, supervisors, and line employees in CPS needs improvement.
5. Confidential material is often left exposed on desks and subject to unauthorized access.

## **Findings**

1. Local law enforcement and CPS do not understand each other's needs and responsibilities.

***Response to Finding 1: Respondent disagrees partially with finding.*** Respondent believes law enforcement and CPS have a good understanding their respective roles in the investigation of child abuse and neglect. As mandatory cross reporters, as defined in Penal Code 11165.7, both law enforcement and CPS are cognizant of their legal responsibilities and are in communication with each other and with other agencies throughout the State whose responsibility includes the care and welfare of children. However, both County agencies realize that sometimes a duplication of investigative effort takes place where interdepartmental communication is deficient. To that end, both County agencies are committed to bettering the communication aspect of child abuse and neglect investigations within El Dorado County.

2. Budgetary cutbacks have reduced formal training in CPS.

***Response to Finding 2: The respondent agrees with the finding.*** While some resources continue to be available for CPS training, budgetary cutbacks at the State level have reduced the amount of formal training available to staff. Increased caseload responsibilities have further limited staff time to participate in training. There is a definite need for consistent, job-specific training, particularly for new employees and employees with new assignments.

3. The current evaluation and feedback system for probationary employees in CPS limits understanding of their progress in work performance and affects the services they are expected to provide.

***Response to Finding 3: The respondent agrees with the finding.*** The current evaluation and feedback system has been inconsistent, sometimes thorough, but often inadequate and lacking in substance.

4. Leadership fails to maintain effective communication between management and line employees leading to confusion and angst among employees.

***Response to Finding 4: The respondent agrees with the finding.*** Communication between management, supervisors, and line staff has been inconsistent, frequently inadequate, and often complicated by a lack of clear policies and guidelines.

5. Security rules for confidential information are ignored.

***Response to Finding 5: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.*** Files or other records containing confidential materials may be open on social worker desks while cases are in progress. However, interior access to the building is restricted to employees and approved escorted visitors. While fully concurring on the importance of confidentiality, the respondent is aware of no problems or incidents involving unauthorized access to confidential information. Should an unauthorized access situation be brought to the attention of the respondent, it would be addressed immediately.

6. Inconsistent application of written CPS guidelines diminishes care and support of children and results in frustration of individual CPS workers.

***Response to Finding 6: The respondent agrees with the finding.*** Improved communication and more consistent application of the CPS guidelines are needed.

## **Recommendations**

1. Establish a formal training program between CPS and local law enforcement.

***Response to Recommendation 1: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.*** Written protocols and multidisciplinary efforts are already in place in the Tahoe Basin CPS and law enforcement offices, and may serve as a model for application countywide. Local law enforcement and CPS will work together to determine an effective and formal process for ensuring annual joint training regarding shared needs and responsibilities in working CPS cases, with training to be initiated during fiscal year 2004-2005. In addition, there are several annual training sessions sponsored by the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) held throughout the State to which both CPS personnel and Law Enforcement investigators are invited. The County will make every effort to schedule these cooperative training opportunities as they become available.

2. Additional formal training is required for CPS employees to understand the department's needs and objectives.

***Response to Recommendation 2: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.*** A renewed focus already has been placed on training within the Human Services Department. In addition to planning more training opportunities for CPS workers during the 2004-2005 fiscal year, the Department will continue its emphasis on improved internal communications regarding program needs and objectives. Training class schedules will be posted to increase awareness and participation by CPS employees.

3. Perform evaluations more than once a year for probationary employees. Feedback must be provided on a continuous basis.

***Response to Recommendation 3: The recommendation has been implemented.***

Supervisory staff in the Human Services Department have been instructed to provide ongoing guidance and feedback at least monthly to probationary employees, and to conduct formal evaluations in a timely manner and in accordance with County requirements. A tracking system is being developed to monitor probationary conferences and evaluations. Additional supervisory training is planned.

4. Refine the program guidelines making them clear and concise. Leadership must monitor and evaluate application of the revised guidelines.

***Response to Recommendation 4: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.***

Following the recent Department-level administrative re-organization approved by the Board of Supervisors, management is currently undertaking a redesign of CPS and the implementation of a structured decision making process. The Human Services Department intends to incorporate new guidelines into training materials and desk guides over the next two fiscal years. Toward this goal, work by CPS and law enforcement management leaders is presently underway to open up communications and clarify expectations regarding casework.

5. CPS must comply with confidentiality rules and laws.

***Response to Recommendation 5: The recommendation has been implemented.*** Staff will continue, of necessity, to have confidential materials open while working in restricted access areas. However, emphasis is and will be placed on confidentiality in all situations involving client information.