



CHILD WELFARE SERVICES AND FOSTER CARE AT A GLANCE

# California’s system to protect children and strengthen families

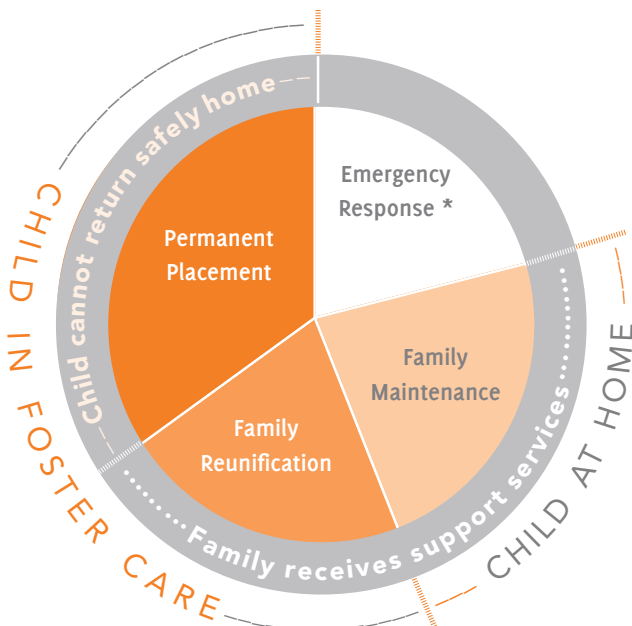
California established its current child welfare system in 1982. In line with federal law, the purpose of the system is to protect children from abuse and neglect while keeping families intact to the extent possible. State law establishes critical benchmarks and specific time-limited programmatic interventions to determine how children enter the child welfare system, what to do to support children and families once they are in the system, and how to find permanent homes when children who have been removed from their families can’t return home.

California is one of 11 states where counties administer their own child welfare programs with state supervision. Under this arrangement, the California Department of Social Services is the lead agency responsible for developing regulations and securing federal funding, while county child welfare agencies are responsible for providing direct services to children and families in response to child abuse and neglect reports. If a child must be removed from the home for safety reasons, court oversight is required.

The child welfare system in California is structured around four program components (collectively known as Child Welfare Services) that are provided in three successive stages as needed to protect the best interests of the child.

## THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF CALIFORNIA’S CHILD WELFARE SERVICES SYSTEM

Child Placement and Family Support Services by Component



\* Immediate child placement and family support services depend on the initial assessment conducted in response to the emergency report.

### THE ROLE OF THE COURT

Child welfare cases remain under county jurisdiction unless a child is taken into protective custody and a judge declares the child a “dependent” of the court. The juvenile dependency court has ultimate authority over what happens to children who have been removed from the home, although county social workers continue to make placement recommendations and manage the case.

**Court Appointed Special Advocates** — CASA volunteers are trained and serve as sworn officers of the court to advocate for the best interests of a child who has been removed from the home due to abuse or neglect. CASA volunteers get to know the child, help determine the child’s best interests, attend court hearings, ensure court-ordered services are provided and provide a stable presence in the child’s life.

### STAGE 1: Initial Contact

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES** — County conducts initial screening and investigation in response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Child may be taken into protective custody and/or family may receive 30 days emergency assistance.

### STAGE 2: Family Support Services

**FAMILY MAINTENANCE SERVICES** — Family is provided with six to 12 months of support services to address problems. Child remains in the home with social worker oversight.

**FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES** — Child is placed in temporary foster care while parents work on ameliorating the circumstances that led to the child’s removal (up to 18 months).

### STAGE 3: Permanency Alternatives

**PERMANENT PLACEMENT SERVICES** — Social worker seeks a permanent home for a child who cannot return safely to his or her family after a defined period of time.

Local child welfare agencies are given significant latitude within this framework for determining how services will be provided to families within their jurisdiction.

Recent nationwide trends are shifting child welfare services toward a more dynamic system that is driven by outcomes. In California, a robust and transparent accountability system has been established that tracks publicly available performance data and invites greater input from everyone involved — from children and families to social workers and community-based service providers. As new information is gleaned about what works to keep children safe, child welfare services will continue to evolve and improve.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

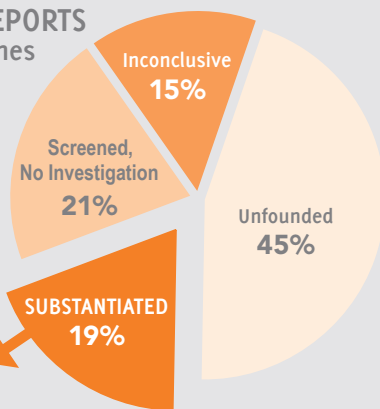
The goal of Emergency Response is to protect children from harm. Initial entry into the child welfare system begins with a report made to the Emergency Response program operated by the county child welfare agency. Almost all reports are made through the county's 24-hour hotline. About three-quarters of the calls are received from "mandated reporters," such as law enforcement, health care providers, teachers, counselors and film processors. Nearly a half-million child abuse reports are made to county hotlines in California each year.

**Screening and Investigation** — If the social worker who screens the call determines that a child is at imminent or substantial risk, state law requires an immediate in-person response. Otherwise, social workers have 10 days to make an in-person visit. If the report lacks evidence and risk appears low, the social worker will close the case but may refer a family to voluntary services and community resources.

**Substantiated Reports** — Social workers find credible evidence to substantiate reports in almost 20% of the cases. More than 60% of substantiated reports involve neglect or caretaker incapacity. During the course of investigation, social workers are authorized to take children into short-term protective custody, if needed, while they assess the appropriate course of action. They may also provide up to 30 days of assistance to the family if needed to alleviate the stress that is placing the child at risk. Substantiated reports result in continued county involvement and may result in court intervention as well.

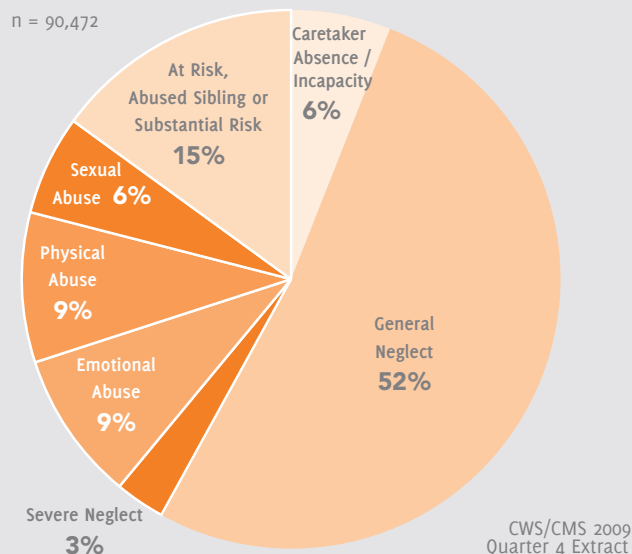
### OUTCOMES OF REPORTS to Emergency Hotlines

n = 471,790



### SUBSTANTIATED Reports by Type

n = 90,472



## FAMILY MAINTENANCE

The goal of Family Maintenance is to allow children who are not at immediate or high risk to stay safely at home by providing resources and supports to the family with social worker supervision. Services may be voluntary or court-mandated. Family Maintenance is provided for six months and may be extended in six-month increments on a case-by-case basis.

### TYPES OF FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Counties provide family support services to help parents provide safe and stable homes for their children. Common types of family support services include:

- Counseling
- Respite care
- Emergency housing
- Domestic violence intervention
- Substance abuse treatment
- In-home caregivers
- Parenting education

## FOSTER CARE

Foster care is one of the options provided through the child welfare system. It is intended as a temporary solution to keep children safe while parents are working toward reunification.

### TYPES OF FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS

Federal law requires children in foster care to be cared for in the "least restrictive setting" possible. States must first try to place children who need foster care with relatives before turning to placements in private foster homes, group facilities, treatment facilities or shelters. Sometimes relatives "don't want to get involved" or cannot meet approval standards. Other times, relatives simply cannot provide the level of structure and care required to meet the multiple and complex needs of children who have been abused and neglected.

Types of foster care providers approved by the State are listed below (in order of increasingly specialized or restrictive levels of care):

**Kinship Care** — This is care provided by a relative of the child. Homes where kinship care is provided are required to meet the same health and safety standards as other foster family homes.

**Foster Family Homes** — These are private homes that are licensed to care for up to six children (or eight if it is a sibling group). Families are interviewed and the homes inspected for health and safety compliance. Foster parents receive pre-placement training and must have sufficient income without the foster care payment.

**Foster Family Agencies (FFA)** — These are nonprofit agencies that recruit and certify family homes to provide treatment or therapeutic foster care for children with special needs or who are awaiting adoption through adoption agencies. FFAs employ their own social workers to oversee placements, but county social workers remain responsible for case management services including making recommendations to the court.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The goal of Family Reunification is to help families create a safe environment so that a child who has been removed from the home can return. Family services (similar to those provided under Family Maintenance) are provided for up to 18 months to assist parents in achieving this goal. As they work to reunify families, social workers also identify alternative permanent placements so the child doesn't spend more time in foster care should the parents fail to fulfill the terms of their reunification plan. This practice is referred to as "concurrent planning."

## PERMANENT PLACEMENT

The opportunity to grow up in a safe, secure and loving home — with a "permanent family" — is the intended result of all child welfare services. The most preferred option is reunification with the family. When efforts to maintain or reunify the family do not succeed within a reasonable period, social workers strive to find another permanent home for the child.

**Adoption** — Adoption creates a new parent-child relationship by legally terminating the birth parents' rights and transferring those rights and responsibilities to the adoptive parents. Adoptions may occur through both public and private adoption agencies.

**Legal Guardianship** — Legal guardianship is an arrangement where an adult has court-ordered authority to make decisions on behalf of the child that a biological parent would make. Although the guardian takes care of the child's personal needs, including shelter, education and medical care, the biological parents remain legally obligated to support the child. Legal guardianship is not permanent; guardians may resign and parents may petition the court to resume custody. Guardianship ends when a child turns age 18.

**Long-Term Foster Care** — If the child welfare agency cannot reunify the family, an adoptive home is not available, and a legal guardian does not come forward, other planned permanent living arrangements are considered. The child may be placed in long-term foster care with relatives or non-relatives or in a group home.

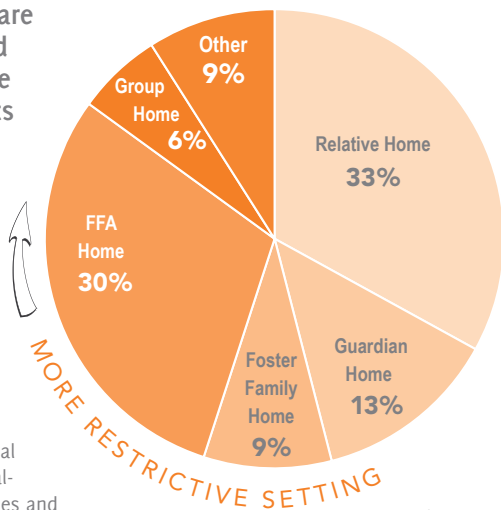
## KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE AND ADOPTION ASSISTANCE

California encourages relatives and other adults to provide stable homes for children who would otherwise end up in long-term foster care through its Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (KinGAP) and Adoptions Assistance programs. Community programs funded by the State offer services such as respite care, parenting support, mental health and educational assessments, tutoring and counseling. The KinGAP program provides a monthly stipend to relatives who become legal guardians. Monthly financial assistance is also available to relatives and foster parents who adopt siblings, an older child or a child with special needs.

### Child Welfare Supervised Foster Care Placements by Type \*

\* As of 1/1/10  
n = 59,868

"Other" may include pre-adoptive homes, medical facilities, tribal-specified homes and court-specified homes



CWS/CMS 2009  
Quarter 4 Extract

**Group Homes** — These homes provide 24-hour supervision in a structured environment. They range from small group homes licensed for up to six foster children to facilities that can house large numbers of children. Some group homes have a treatment component as part of their operational plan.

**Community Treatment Facilities** — These are secure environments that serve seriously disturbed children who cannot be appropriately treated in a group home but need a less restrictive setting than a psychiatric hospital. Facilities are jointly regulated with the Department of Mental Health. There are five such facilities in California.

## FOSTER CARE OUTCOMES

At any given time, seven out of 10 children in the child welfare system are in foster care. Among those who exit, approximately half will return home and another 30% will be adopted or exit to live with legal guardians (usually relatives).

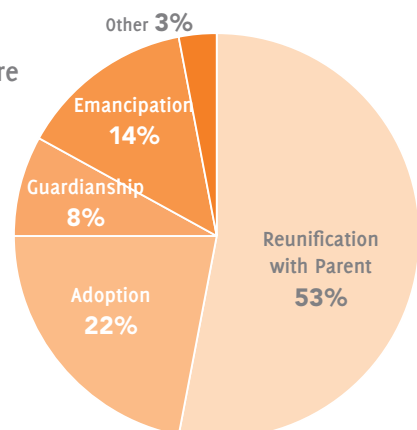
Although foster care is intended as a temporary solution to the problem of child abuse and neglect, some children remain in foster care long term. More than 15% leave and return to foster care more than once, and a small but significant percentage "emancipate" when they "age out" of the child welfare system at age 18 while still in foster care.

### Child Welfare Supervised Foster Care Exits by Reason \*

\* Restricted to children in care eight days or more

n = 33,013

"Other" may include juvenile detention and running away.



CWS/CMS 2009  
Quarter 4 Extract

## NEED FOR COLLABORATION

The complex interrelated issues faced by children and families struggling with abuse and neglect underscore the need for interagency and community coordination.

### NEEDS OF FAMILIES

- **Employment Assistance.** Two-thirds of families in the child welfare system are in the CalWORKs cash assistance and employment program.
- **Alcohol and Other Drug Interventions.** Parental substance abuse is a factor in an estimated two-thirds of foster care cases.
- **Domestic Violence Prevention.** Domestic violence and child maltreatment often occur under the same roof.

### NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

- **Health Care.** Half of children in foster care suffer from chronic health conditions.
- **Mental Health Services.** Emotional, behavioral and developmental problems are three to six times higher among children in foster care than the general population.
- **Educational Support.** High percentages of children in foster care have difficulty performing at grade level or require special education services.

## FUNDING

More than \$5.3 billion in public funds is currently spent on child welfare services and related costs in California. Federal sources pay for about half of the cost and the State and counties share the remaining cost. Federal funds are provided directly to various state agencies through a complex application and approval process. Counties must then work with these state agencies to obtain funds for various programs. Additional funds (not reflected below) that support children and youth who have had contact with the child welfare system include court services and assistance to emancipated foster youth.

### CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM EXPENDITURES IN CALIFORNIA \* 2009-10 APPROPRIATION \*\*

Child Welfare Services	\$ 2,541,195,000
Grants to Foster Care Providers	1,552,602,000
Child Eligibility Determinations	104,482,000
State Supervision and Licensing	14,880,000
Adoptions	153,345,000
Cash Assistance to Adoptive Parents	811,743,000
Cash Assistance to Kinship Guardians	144,889,000

**TOTAL** **\$ 5,323,136,000**

\* Combined funding sources (federal, state and county)

\*\* Figures reflect fiscal year 2009-10 appropriation



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## MULTIPLE STATE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

A myriad of state agencies and departments provide services and support to children and families served by the state's child welfare system. The Child Welfare Council provides overall policy support and coordination, while the State Interagency Team for Children and Youth coordinates programmatic support and cross-agency access to funding streams and resources.

## COUNTY IMPROVEMENTS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Counties, in partnership with the California Department of Social Services, are involved in two statewide reform efforts that are currently underway to increase community participation and improve results for children.

**Outcomes and Accountability System (AB 636)** — Child welfare agencies in California began receiving quarterly data reports in 2004 that measure progress toward specific performance goals. Based on the data, each county child welfare agency is required to investigate areas needing improvement and to develop a System Improvement Plan (SIP) with input from the local community. By sharing data and inviting local stakeholders to participate in problem solving, the new accountability system is ushering in a new era of openness and transparency in addressing child welfare needs.

**Key System Improvements** — State implementation of key system improvements have helped contribute to a more than 40% decline in foster care cases over the last decade:

- **Statewide Safety Assessment:** Using standardized and comprehensive assessment tools to ensure the consistent evaluation of risk and safety.
- **Differential Response:** Working with community organizations to develop a broader set of responses when child welfare agencies receive possible abuse and neglect reports.
- **Permanency and Youth Transitions:** Engaging youth and families — and the adults who are to play a permanent role in a youth's life — in making decisions and planning for the youth's future.
- **Wraparound Services:** Using funds flexibly to support children and youth living with their parents, relatives and in other home-like settings.

## PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS

Private philanthropy has been a crucial partner in improving statewide child welfare services outcomes. Recent surveys of philanthropic investment show that foundations contribute approximately \$25 million per year in grants to support families, children and youth who are in or have recently exited the child welfare system in California. These funds are dedicated to improving child safety, permanency and well-being outcomes tracked by the Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System (AB 636). Initiatives include training, technical assistance, peer-to-peer learning, grants and infrastructure that inspire innovations in child welfare practices and service delivery systems.

To support philanthropic efforts, the state has established the Child Welfare Services Improvement Fund to provide matching funds for innovative projects.

The California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership includes the Administrative Office of the Courts, California Department of Social Services, County Welfare Directors Association, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Stuart Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation and Zellerbach Family Foundation.