

Building a Bridge to High-Quality Child Care for Foster Children



County of Los Angeles
Department of Children and Family Services



ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT



CHILDREN NOW



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
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Child Care for Foster Children: An Overview

When children are removed from their parents due to abuse and neglect, they are in crisis and need a safe, loving family environment. But for our youngest children, one of the top barriers to finding placement is the lack of access to child care. In an October 2015 survey conducted by ACHSA, 100 percent of foster family agencies cited that concerns about child care affect recruitment and the willingness of foster parents to accept young children into their care. Over two-thirds reported that their foster children had been denied eligibility for subsidized child care. In another survey of social workers charged with finding placements in the Children's Welcome Center, an estimated 25 percent of the denials were due to the lack of child care.

Increasing access to child care would enable a larger pool of families to become foster parents, providing a stable home for more children in need. Furthermore, we know that for all the benefits that high quality child care has on children ages 0 to 5, the impact can be even more dramatic for young children who have experienced the trauma of abuse, neglect and removal from their homes. With 28 counties applying for 2015 Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention & Support funds for child care purposes, this is clearly a statewide unmet need.

The Access Barrier

Immediately following a child's removal, resource families, including relative caregivers, struggle to access child care because State child care programs often operate at full capacity. Many of these programs can only sign up children during short enrollment windows that may not align with the moment of a child's placement into foster care. This means that caregivers who work or are in school cannot take in a child without significantly disrupting their lives or putting their family in financial jeopardy. In addition, State child care enrollment is complicated and resource families may languish on waiting lists.

Proposed Solution: Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children

We can help resource families access subsidized care closer to the time of placement by building a bridge to long-term child care. To do this effectively, we propose a three-part solution that includes:

(1) an emergency child care voucher, (2) the support of a child care navigator, (3) workforce training to support trauma-informed care.

(1) Emergency voucher

Under this new program, any resource family that needs child care for children ages 0 through 3, as well as parenting foster youth, would receive an immediate, time-limited voucher to pay for child care for up to six months following the child's placement into their home. This emergency voucher would ensure the child can be cared for when the caregiver is at work, school, or fulfilling training and home approval requirements. Estimates show that this would cost about \$22 million statewide.

(2) Child care navigator support

Navigators would work with the resource family to facilitate use of the emergency voucher to ensure a foster child's immediate access to child care. Going forward, the navigator would continue to work with the family to transition or stabilize the child into a long-term, high quality licensed child development setting.¹ Navigators would also facilitate continuity and help prevent gaps in care. Administered by the county Resource & Referral agencies, child care navigator support is estimated to cost \$4 million.

(3) Trauma-informed care

To meet the unique needs of abused and neglected children, child care providers will require additional support and training specifically in the area of trauma-informed care. With a trainer to cover every county, this workforce training proposal would also include coordination at the State level and cost roughly \$5 million.

Summary

By building a bridge between California's child welfare and child care systems, we can recruit and retain more resource families, stabilize children at a critical moment of their lives, and help ensure that they can benefit from high-quality, ongoing, trauma-informed child development services that prepare them for school and life.

¹ Based either on a determination of their CPS status (as defined in Education Code 8263) or their status as a "family of one," foster children are placed at the top of any waiting list. As such, it is reasonable to expect that, with the help of a navigator, they could effectively be transitioned into a licensed child care program.