The following is a summary of findings from the three major activities that made up the LCWEP: Stakeholders Interviews, Focus Groups, and Case Reviews. This summary includes a list of those who participated and the questions used to guide each of the major activities. The findings from the Stakeholder Interviews and the Focus Groups are separated by the general themes: Trauma, Family Voice, Cultural Proficiency, Access to Resources, Skilled Staff, and Family as a Resource. The findings from the Case Reviews are separated by themes that surface during the review process: Engagement of the Family, Extended Family Support, Role of the Father, Linkages to Services, and Advocacy.

### STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

One-on-One stakeholder interviews were conducted from representatives from:

- Court
- Law Enforcement
- Education
- Medical
- Prevention Services
- Benefits

**INTERVIEW FINDINGS:** The following are the findings, separated by general themes of Trauma, Family Voice, Cultural Proficiency, Access to Resources, Skilled Staff, and Family as a Resource:

**Trauma:**

- In general, there is little understanding in the CWS about the life experience of the Latino family, especially for immigrants.
- No trauma training designed for frontend workers.
- Latino families are among the poorest families in SCC and the CWS have little understanding of the family struggles and the emotional toll.
Little understanding of traumas stemming from history of segregation, discrimination, immigration, racism, poor working condition, etc. and how historical trauma impacts Latino families.

Level of understanding of trauma varies widely throughout CWS

When parents are grieving because they lost their children and living with too much pain, the focus is often on what they are not doing right.

JR responses are very helpful to law enforcement in helping families who have experienced trauma: Social workers are “the voice of serenity, when securing the house.

CWS involvement is traumatic to a child; but how a staff interacts with the child makes all the difference; get down to child’s level, use simple language, etc.

Mixed messages at schools, when taught not to go with strangers and then school allows children to go with CWS staff that are often strangers to the child.

Often victims are tied to perpetrators financially and cannot seek out help for their trauma.

Undocumented families live in constant fear, so any contact with a government agency can be very traumatic. CWS does not always take this into account as they are assessing family situations.

For families eligible for CalWORKS, they can access treatment resources for up to 12 months. This is not general understood by SW staff.

History of trauma is often not noted in the families’ case file and in CWS/CMS.

Victims of domestic violence be afraid to call police for help or ask for help, but may view their churches as a safe place to get services for their DV related trauma.

Family Voice

Often CWS staff have fixed opinions and assumptions, so family explanations are not given much credence.

Issues such as overcrowded housing conditions, poor work conditions, immigration, etc are often overlooked by policy but are used to judged families.

Family voice takes second place to the professional “safe voice”; this is true in settings such as court, TDMs, etc.

Families’ opinions on how to keep their children safe are often not considered.

Court can be intimidating; resulting in quieting rather than encouraging family voice.

DFCS can change its perception of an intimidating agency in the community by being more involved in the community and in this way help increase family and community voice.

How much family voice is a part of a case often depends on what DFCS staff is assigned to work with the family.
There is often a disconnect between what parents think they need and what CWS thinks they need.

Front end pressures to respond and close out referrals quickly make it virtually impossible for DFCS to involve extended family in helping parents and children.

DR Path II is a great service that services entire family, but now there is waiting list to access these services.

Family voice is often suppressed because CWS is perceived a law enforcement entity, with connections to immigration agencies.

In the front end, diverting children from the system is the primary goal, so extended family are always considered as a way to keep children out of foster care.

TDMs and Family Conferences are formal ways to facilitate family voice, however these are generally not available in the front end and families are not always included.

For common cases (CalWORKS/DFCS) meeting involving the family, SW and the Employment Counselor is ideal to ensure family voice and avoid conflicts in the plans.

Cultural Proficiency

Differences exists in standards of safety, between families and the CWS.

Cultural mores and legal differences from US and other countries is not always understood within CWS.

DFCS staff who have worked regularly with Latino families and the Spanish speaking social workers are impressive and generally have the ability to build rapport with the families.

The families who are assigned a bilingual/bicultural social workers have a more positive view of the Department.

When there is no language or cultural match, the families have a more negative view of the Department; the families are not as engaged.

Cultural proficiency in CWS is “a work-in-progress.” However policy don’t always match what is culturally proficient. There are varying degrees of proficiency.

Having social workers and families matched culturally and by language is very helpful.

In general, there is a lack of understanding of the struggles faced by families without legal residency.

Diversity within Latino community is not often recognized.

Specialized Spanish speaking units with strong knowledge in Latino culture and issues, such as immigration are good and another Spanish specialty unit is needed.

Access to Resources

There are culturally relevant resources but Latino families may be leery about accessing them due because of fear
that their children may be taken away by these resources.

- The recent higher expectations placed on SWs, to remove children and to identify more family strength, have resulted in fewer removals.

- Barriers to accessing resources include: limited language capacity, interventions with “one size fits all” models.

- In the courts, families have a hard time understanding the process, especially for Spanish speakers; legal terms do not always translate to regular language.

- There is lack of services to help families with the basic needs.

- Often the biggest barrier is not qualifying for benefits such as Medi-Cal and CalWORKS.

- Another barrier is the shame families feel about being involved in CWS.

- Stigma about mental health services still exist and can be a barrier to access.

- Lack of awareness that there is help for abusive relationships, especially for new immigrants, is often a barrier.

- Families used to be able to access Parenting without Violence class with a voluntary case. Now, if they take the class, they have to pay.

**Skilled Staff**

- Messages from within CWS are often very strong, with a “do-what-I-say” approach.

- CWS needs better engagement skills.

- Often new, inexperience staff lacks life experiences to help with assessments and to relate to families and their struggles.

- The “following the rules” approach to child welfare services is more common than utilizing basic social work skills to help families.

- The law often prevents creativity and flexibility.

- Safety assessments are based on middle class values and standards of safety without consideration of diversity.

- All services providers (including DFCS staff) involved with a family should come together to provide a more coordinated and skilled, multi-disciplinary approach to CWS services to families.

- There is often a lack of understanding of how important respect is within Latino culture.

- Relationships are a huge part of Latino culture. CWS work often involves quick interactions between staff and families. This approach does not work well in Latino families.

- More male CWS staff and service providers are sorely needed to work with Latino men.
CWS needs updated training on recent drug trends, such as PTSD stemming from drug cartel activity.

Too many social worker changes can make engagement difficult.

Families are often confused by the numbers of social workers involved in their cases. Should keep numbers of SW to a minimum.

Balancing social work with legal mandates is a dilemma.

Family as a Resource

Differential Response and other similar programs involve parents and extended family and need to be expanded.

Often only parents are involved in cases, not extended family.

Some families have no relatives close by but may view friends, neighbors, members of church, etc as family. CWS should engage these people to help support Latino families.

Families are often relative caregivers.

CWS often focuses on the mothers and do not include fathers in their services.

DFCS does involve family members who come forth but could do more to include them in putting together a plan to support the parents and children.

DFCS should ask the family who they consider as family and involve them in the case.

Diversion from CWS is based primarily on the support of extended family. Front end is diverting more and more, resulting in few families entering CWS.

FOCUS GROUPS

Participants in Focus Group were representatives from the following groups:

- Parents (English & Spanish Speaking)
- Foster Youth (Current & Former)
- Education
- Therapists
- DFCS staff
- Large Service Providers
- Churches
- Gang Intervention
- Youth Programs
• Alanon/AA/NA
• Parent Education
• Traditional County Partners
• Non-Traditional Community Partners

PARENT AND YOUTH FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:

- Describe your first contact with CPS for example: communication, approach, etc. Did you feel a connection was established? Did you feel respected? Did you feel your family was respected?
- Did you feel heard? Did you feel that the social worker understood the way you live? Your custom? Your values?
- Were you offered resources? Were the resources helpful and/or accessible? Was your family considered as a natural support?

PARENT FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES:

Trauma

- Lots of trauma: DV abusive relationship, mental abuse, led to drug use;
- Not enough time given to adjust emotionally.
- Needed time to deal with emotions; didn’t need to be constantly pushed.... “I wasn’t a robot”
- Expected to begin work on case plan without time to deal emotions, especially the grief related to a child’s removal.
- Children are punished when they are removed
- Families are re-traumatized when a child is removed

Family Voice

- Good experience: DFCS staff took the time to learn about me, even knew my nick name, talked to my friends and family, and learned I was a good mother
- Two parents described being arrested without being listened to and without considering the entire situation (one with a son who was gang involved and she fear him and the other who said the allegations were untrue)
- Felt respect when they were listen to; felt disrespected when they were not listened to.
- Changing social workers is hard; hard to start to trust someone new
- Parents felt that their voice carried far less weight than those of their children, especially their teens—that their parental authority was not respected.
Cultural Proficiency

- Felt like I was being judged
- Staff didn’t know how to approach me and felt like I was being stereotyped.
- Court process was too fast paced
- Younger children learn to be defiant by older children and know they will get away with it in the CWS
- Felt that parental authority was undermined because their house rules were more strict than the CWS/foster care rules.
- Also felt their parental authority was undermined when their children are given more material things in foster care than the parents can offer in their homes.
- System gives teens too much freedom
- System sometimes tricks children into saying things, by saying this will help their parent.

Access to Resources

- Young mothers tend to have the hardest time and need more support
- Dealing with a difficult financial situation leaves some families feeling desperate.
- Financial problems are huge stressors. Need more help in this area.
- Needed support from someone like a parent advocate, who I could relate to.
- Really appreciated services received at the Family Resource Centers, especially support based services, such as parent advocates, DV support groups, and Parenting without Violence.
- Found services offered in-home were the most helpful.
- Wished Drug/Alcohol services were offered in the home to the entire family, instead of out of the home and just for the parents.

Skilled Staff

- Bad experience: CWS staff didn’t take time to get to know me vs Good experience: CWS staff did take time to get to know me.
- S.W. didn’t know how to approach me. Just did her job and that was it.
- Not everything was explained to me, in court and with rest of CWS.
- SW did help me by teaching me to be a better parent, sending family to counseling, getting to know me and my family.
- In Court, Spanish speaking parents felt they were not understood and did not understand what was happening.

Family as a Resource
- Good experience when they talked to my friends and family.
- In general, friends and family were not included.
- When children are in foster care, often felt like their family was being replaced by another family. Felt like their extended family should have been more involved with their children.

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES:

Trauma
- Describe initial removal vividly
- Used words such as scary, crying, didn’t know what was happening
- Exposure to drugs, DV, sexual abuse, physical abuse
- One teen described she had a good therapist to help deal with trauma

Family Voice
- When youth spoke about their family’s involvement in CWS case, it was for placement or when a placement with family failed; not for support or contact.
- CWS give teens too much freedom despite objections from parents.

Cultural Proficiency
- Identified an obvious gap in cultures between teens and parents
- CWS gives teen too much freedom. Teens didn’t think the freedom was necessarily a good thing; led to trouble.

Access to Resources
- A good therapist was very helpful
- Services like counseling, food, medical, goals and education assistance were helpful.
- Life skills are good to learn, too, but some teens don’t take advantage of them.
- Need more help with drugs and gangs.

**Skilled Staff**

- Youth described skilled staff as those who listened, called regularly, did what they said, and help get what they needed.
- Youth described unskilled staff as those who did not call or visit often, didn’t do what they say, weren’t willing to meet teen halfway.

**Family as a Resource**

- Teens described their families as a resource only when it related to a placement need.

**DFCS STAFF FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:**

- Does the Department acknowledge and understand the diversity of life experiences of Latino families and how it affects trauma?
- How responsive is the Department to the family voice? How does the Department consider family voice when making practice decisions? How is family used as a natural resource to support the family?
- How can the agency encourage and support a more skilled and culturally proficient staff at all levels: front line staff, supervisors, managers, etc? How can the agency adapt trainings to be more relevant to day to day practice?

**DFCS STAFF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES:**

**Trauma**

- In the front end, priority is to close out referrals quickly and not enough time to address trauma with families.
- SWs are often told not to spend too much time with families: investigate and close.
- Because of the quick turn around at the front end, issues are not truly attended to, they can escalate and lead to more referrals for a family.

**Family Voice**

- Although families are included in TDMs, usually only the birth parents are involved.
- DFCS and the CWS in general should model listening to Family Voice by listening to each other at all levels.

**Cultural Proficiency**
More and more families are being assigned workers without a cultural match or language match.

Coding needs to be accurate to ensure DFCS knows what culturally relevant services are needed, such as bilingual staff, culturally relevant community services, etc.

Family Resource Centers’ services need to be broaden, including more VFM social workers that match cultural needs of the families.

During staffing, too much weight is given to legal issues and not enough to long-term clinical/family issues. This likely stems from a general lack of understand of culture.

Access to Resources

- With recent cuts to the budget, it appears there is more concern with saving money than truly meeting family’s needs.
- Case transfers need to be handled more efficiently. Delays cause gaps in services, leaving family in crisis without support.
- Family Resource Centers’ services need to be broaden, including more VFM social workers that match cultural needs of the families.
- More gang and drug intervention services are needed, especially for teens on the cusp of or already involved in the delinquency system.
- Differential Response, Path II, need to be expanded. Too many families that can benefit from these services are put waiting lists, and families can’t wait. Sometimes, families’ cases are opened within the CWS in order to get services they need.

Skilled Staff

- Latino families come from different places, religions, and backgrounds. Staff need better understanding of these differences.
- Training needs to be more relevant and current, for example lots of families experiencing trauma related to drug cartel violence and gang activity but there is little training in these areas.
- Spanish Speaking SWs are often so overextended, they burnout and their performance is effected.
- Staff are often investigating the same family on same issue but different referrals. This could be due to the quick turn around required in referrals, not allowing staff enough time to focus on family services or to gather all information needed for an in-depth assessment.
- General sense of disconnect between management and line staff, leading to a general misunderstanding of staff needs or skill levels.
Family as a Resource

- DFCS needs to better understand what causes relative placement to fail and then use this information to boast up services in those areas.
- Families are included in TDMs, but their involvement in general are very limited.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:

- Was the information you received in the referral accurate? Was it helpful in developing a service plan to meet the needs of the Latino family? Did your relationship with the Department help you meet the needs of the family?
- Were we able to meet the language and cultural needs of the families? Were there barriers to accessing services? Language and cultural proficiency of staff? Eligibility criteria for services? If yes, how were you successful? If no, what were the barriers?
- As partners, do we meet the language and cultural needs of Latino families? Are there access barriers with regards to language and culturally proficient staff? What are your thoughts/ideas to improve the system overall and reduce the number of Latino children and families coming into the system?
- What is your understanding of how DFCS works with the community? What does the relationship between DFCS and the community look like now? What do you envision the relationship should be? How would we accomplish that vision?
- Based on your knowledge of the Latino community, how well do you think the Department understands Latino families? How well do we meet the needs of Latino families?
- Based on your experience working with Latino families, how do they perceive DFCS?

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES:

Trauma:

- DFCS is overwhelmed with workload and often not able to deal with trauma.
- Engagement is crucial for families to be successful and for DFCS to understand trauma.
- Sometimes mandated reports are reluctant to call in abuse/neglect reports for fear that the family may be re-traumatized.

Family Voice

- Families don’t seem to know their case plans.
Parents feel forced to do services, whether they believe they need them or whether they agree on the source.

Cultural Proficiency

- Families fear CWS
- When children are removed, parents believe it is they are bad parents
- Parent may not be revealing all information to service providers and CWS because of fear of repercussion, even though they need help.
- All Latinos are often viewed the same; not understanding that there is much diversity among Latino families.
- Even with some bilingual staff and Spanish/English forms, the system is based in an English language and culture.
- Court reports are often focused on family deficits. They should be supportive and motivate families to improve their situations. Negative words are judgmental and non-supportive.
- Immigrant families are not aware of laws in the U.S.

Access to Resources

- Services providers often feel in the dark and therefore unable to provide needed services
- Transportation is crucial for some families.
- Families often have to be in crisis to get services. More prevention services needed to avoid problems escalating, leading to entry into CWS.
- Resources to families should include life skills and basic needs support, such as financial skills, assistance, and budgeting.
- Families are often overwhelmed with financial problems, low or no job opportunities, housing issues, etc. Case plan never include help with these issues, that often the primary source of stress for families.
- Services providers for Latino should come together and learn more about each other, in an effort to better serve Latino families, rather than continuing to work in silos.
- Services providers that are a part of the CWS, do not refer families to other community resources because they are not aware of what resources are available in the community.
- CWS often demands too much from families.
CASE REVIEWS

Case Selection Process:

1. 45 cases were selected at random from a list of referrals during the year 2009.
2. Case Selection Criteria:
   - Legal Status (50/50)
     a. US Citizen/Resident
     b. Undocumented
   - Language (50/50)
     a. English
     b. Spanish
3. Referrals were selected from each category below, for a total sample of 45:
   - Case (substantiated referral that graduated to a Dependency Court case), N=15
   - Substantiated (substantiated referral but referred out to Informal Supervision or Voluntary Family Maintenance), N=15
   - Inconclusive / Unfounded, N=15

Development of Case Review Tools

- An Initial Tool was used to conduct the actual case reviews, followed the model used for the Institutional Analysis.
- Then, a Second Tool was developed to measure a series of themes gathered from the case review analysis.

Significant Themes Gather from Analysis:

- Micro Level:
  - Engagement of Family
  - Extended Family Support
  - Role of the Father
  - Linkages
  - Efforts to Keeping Families Together
  - Advocacy
- Macro Level:
  - Tension between Prevention & CPS Intervention
  - Main Theme of the Referral – an institutional perspective
CASE REVIEW FINDINGS:

Engagement of the Family:
- In general, all families were engaged at a level considered average.
- About a third of families were highly engaged, social workers went the extra mile.
- Often these families were open and responsive to services.
- But, this was not always the case – some parents were at first reluctant.
- No difference between referral type (i.e., unfounded/inconclusive, substantiated, or case).

Extended Family Support:
- Extended family support was generally considered important to identify by reviewers.
- About 65% of the time, extended family supports were identified.
- Extended family supports were more likely to be moderately engaged when the referral was substantiated or graduated to a case.

Role of the Father:
- When fathers were identified, 72% were interviewed, but often minimally to moderately engaged.
- Fathers not interviewed: unknown why, father arrested (and may have been released), deceased, out of State/Country.
- When fathers were interviewed, the level of engagement did not vary by type of referral – it was a moderate level of engagement.
- Fathers in cases were more likely to be linked to services.

Linkages to Services:
- There was slightly better follow-up with families with substantiated referrals or referrals that graduated to a case.

Advocacy:
- There was stronger advocacy for parents and children when the referral was substantiated or graduated to a case.

CASE REVIEW SUMMARY THEMES AND PATTERNS IDENTIFIED:
- Strengths regardless of referral type:
  a. Social workers take time to understand the family
     i. This can also be done quickly and efficiently
  b. Social workers respond uniquely to families’ needs
     i. Facilitated when parents are open to engage in services, but also works with reluctant parents
     ii. SWs able to identify unique needs even when parents proactively seek support
     iii. Advocating for youths’ needs
     iv. SWs capitalize on fathers’ or extended families’ openness to engage in services
Challenges regardless of referral type:
  a. Fathers not fully engaged during investigation and not fully supported in parenting
     i. We may have a culture that ignores that parents may reconcile, that fathers may still be an 
        important caregiver in children’s lives, and believes that just because the father is not in the home, 
        the child is safe.
  b. Brief investigations may not address the underlying issues or identify important family supports

Challenges for non-cases:
  a. Differential Response, Linkages to CalWORKs, and other community supports not fully utilized
     i. Community supports may mitigate stressors (often stemming from poverty) that could impact child 
        safety if not addressed.
  b. No match between need and service
     i. In some instances, services are provided just because they are available (e.g., parenting classes)
     ii. In others, families are fully engaged but only offered services directly linked to the alleged abuse 
        and not the underlying issue.

Challenges for Unfounded and Inconclusive referrals:
  a. Red flags ignored
     i. Focus is on immediate safety of child, but other serious family stressors or challenges are not 
        properly addressed, even though they have been identified (e.g., depression, links to Differential 
        Response, SSI, CalWORKs, or other community services, acute poverty). This occurs also with some 
        social workers with strong engagement skills.
     ii. In serious DV situations, if father is out of the home, the children are considered safe.

CASE REVIEW SUMMARY:

- We could make better use of internal supports to families via Differential Response and CalWORKs Linkages.
- Over 70 percent of fathers are interviewed, but we do not fully appreciate the role they play in children’s lives 
  when we do not engage them fully in services.
- Findings indicate that SCC has social workers with strong engagement skills, but something prevents them from 
  sometimes looking at the underlying issues.
- We need better resources to mitigate the effects of poverty on family dynamics that could impact child safety and 
  wellbeing.