

# 2010-2011 GRAND JURY REPORT

## Riverside County Department of Public Social Services Children's Service Division Child Protective Services, Blythe

### Background

The Children's Services Division of the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) provides individualized interventions to families in which abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred.

Children's Services Division offers comprehensive core services to children and their families within the boundaries of six (6) geographical regions: Desert, Mid-County, Valley, Metro, West corridor, and Southwest. The Desert geographical region extends from Palm Desert in the west to the Arizona border in the east and Riverside County lines on the north and south.

The Blythe Child Protective Services (CPS) office budgeted positions and actual staffing are as follows:

Position Title	Budgeted	Actual
<b>Social Worker Supervisor</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Social Worker V</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Office Assistant III</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Social Services Assistant</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

Each Social Worker manages an average caseload of approximately 38 children. The core services include:

- Central Intake Center – A hotline for receiving information from community members and professionals dealing with children regarding suspected abuse or neglect in specific families.
- Emergency Response – Children's Services staff members who access and intervene in situations of alleged abuse and neglect.
- Court Dependency – Staff members present cases to Juvenile Court for adjudication when children and families are in need of court intervention.

- Court Services – Children’s Services Court Officers prepare and present child abuse and neglect cases to Juvenile Court and communicate specific information on court proceedings to assigned social workers.
- Family Maintenance – Provide services to families whose children are able to remain safely in their own home while services are being provided to alleviate the risk of further abuse or neglect.
- Family Reunification – Services designed to help remedy the underlying causes of abuse and neglect, which when corrected would allow a child to return safely to his/her home.

The CPS office in Blythe is located in the Desert geographical region. This office is responsible for providing necessary services to children and their families in the Palo Verde Community, as well as to the schools and Probation Department. The Blythe CPS office is in a leased facility in a somewhat isolated location on the east end of a shopping center.

Blythe is the furthestmost city in eastern Riverside County, approximately 100 miles east of Indio. The DPSS Indio office serves as the major support service center for the Blythe CPS office. Blythe has a population of approximately 21,000, of whom 8,000 are incarcerated in two (2) nearby state prisons. Blythe has primarily an agricultural based economy with few employment opportunities. The Blythe unemployment rate is currently 15.10%

Several findings in this report are identical or similar to conditions identified in the 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report concerning the Blythe CPS office. Findings in both reports concern staffing, temporary shelters, security and access to community services.

## **Findings**

### **Temporary Shelters**

1. Testimony revealed that social workers are contacted several times a month to remove children from their homes in the Blythe area during late evening or early morning hours for alleged neglect or abuse and are held in the CPS office. This is because there are no temporary shelters available. Two (2) social workers must remain with these children to ensure the child’s safety and well-being until an appropriate placement can be arranged.

## **Foster Homes**

2. In the fiscal year 2003-2004, there were seven certified foster homes in Blythe, but at the time of this current report there are only two. In emergency situations foster homes may be utilized as temporary shelter homes.

Due to the low number of foster homes and lack of shelter facilities in Blythe, children must be transported to Indio or in some cases other communities as far away as Moreno Valley, Riverside, Corona, and Fontana or Rancho Cucamonga in San Bernardino County. These trips can take up to 6-8 hours. This multiplies the time and expense incurred by the county, and the added emotional stress on the individual social workers as well as the anxiety placed on the recently displaced children.

Investigation revealed foster parents have reported they were not always provided access to necessary resources and training (e.g., health services, mental health services, and special education services) to adequately provide for children's needs.

## **Security and Safety**

3. At the time of this report the exterior doors at the Blythe CPS office do not close completely when the staff enters at the back of the building, consequently the alarm system is not always dependable. Although there is lighting in the front of the building, it functions intermittently.

Investigation and inspection of the Blythe CPS office revealed there are two security cameras on the rear of the building. However the poor resolution and improper placement negates the camera's reliability, making identification of people or vehicles virtually impossible.

Further investigation revealed that vehicles often operate in an unsafe manner within the interior of the parking lot near the CPS entrances utilized for moving children into and out of the facility.

The geographical and physical setting of the office, especially in relation to other county facilities attracts a variety of individuals, including vagrants. The necessary night utilization of the facility, usually involving children, presents a definite security issue.

## Services

4. The Blythe CPS social workers and their clients have limited access to local community services and county support systems in the Palo Verde Valley area. These support services are required for individualized intervention to families, which in turn, allow the opportunity for children to be raised in homes free of abuse and neglect. Examples of services required by families through CPS programs include parenting classes, drug treatment and testing, psychotherapy, life skills training services, transportation services and support services to relatives and foster caretakers. Many of these necessary support services are only available at distant locations such as Indio, Riverside or Moreno Valley.

Interviews revealed excessive travel times to receive required services negatively impact social workers' ability to effectively and efficiently manage their caseloads.

Due to minimal staffing levels the Blythe Office of the Department of Mental Health is only able to respond to emergency CPS referrals. A Mental Health Clinical Therapist is needed to expand mental health services capacity to provide both routine and emergency counseling for CPS clients.

Blythe CPS workers must often travel long distances to receive their required professional training.

In an attempt to coordinate CPS activities, *quarterly* meetings are currently held between representatives of CPS, Mental Health and Probation Departments. However, these meetings are too infrequent to best meet the needs of the affected families.

## **Recommendations**

**Riverside County Board of Supervisors  
Riverside County Department of Mental Health  
Riverside County Department of Public Social Services,  
Child Protective Services  
Riverside County Economic Development Agency  
Real Estate Division**

1. DPSS recruit and establish contracts with local licensed facilities to provide temporary shelters for placement of children who are removed from their homes during late evening or early morning hours.

2. DPSS implement a well-orchestrated recruitment effort to expand the number of certified foster care homes and shelter care facilities available in the Palo Verde area. Establish new foster care provider contracts and/or re-activate contracts with foster care providers for child placement, with approval of Community Care Licensing, in Blythe and Indio.
3. Blythe CPS routinely inspect all entrances to ensure the doors properly close and the alarm system functions correctly. Report any maintenance problems to Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) Real Estate Division.

Blythe CPS routinely inspect lighting in both front and rear of the building and report any maintenance problems to Riverside County EDA Real Estate Division for repair.

Blythe CPS ensure that all security cameras are in working condition, DPSS to upgrade and expand coverage of the cameras, and the picture quality, as needed. DPSS place an additional security camera in the front of the building to cover the entrance area of the adjacent parking lot.

DPSS request Riverside County EDA Real Estate Division to contact the property owner to install speed bumps in the back and front parking lots for safety of the employees and children.

4. DPSS contract with local educational institutions such as school districts, Palo Verde College and local non-profit agencies to obtain needed child and family social services in areas such as parenting classes, drug treatment and life skills training.

DPSS fund a Clinical Therapist position assigned to the Blythe Mental Health clinic. This position would expand capacity to provide mental health services for adults and minors referred by Blythe CPS.

DPSS conduct required training of Blythe CPS social workers in Blythe, for example, one trainer coming to Blythe to train six or more social workers as opposed to six persons traveling to Indio or Moreno Valley.

Blythe CPS hold *monthly* meetings between CPS, Mental Health, Probation and other support services deemed appropriate, in order to coordinate the efforts of each department.

Report Issued: 06/28/2011  
Report Public: 06/30/2011  
Response Due: 09/26/2011