



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
COMMISSION FOR  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
FISCAL YEAR  
2002-2003**

**Commission Membership**

**First Supervisorial District:**

*Lily Griego  
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**Second Supervisorial District:**

*Dr. LaDoris McClaney  
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**Third Supervisorial District:**

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*Robert McCaman  
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**Fifth Supervisorial District:**

*Jana S. Cooley  
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**Commission Staff**

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The Commission for Children and Families (Commission) supports the County's effort of being child-focused and family-centered in administering a child welfare system. The Commission, created in 1984 by the Board of Supervisors (Board), serves as an advisor to the Board on children's issues and provides oversight to the Department of Children and Family Services (Department). The Commission is committed to addressing the issues of prevention, permanency, safety, and well-being for all children and families in the County of Los Angeles. To that end, the Commission engages in public and private partnerships and invites community participation to ensure the recommendations submitted to both the Board and County Departments providing services to children and families are well informed and comprehensive. The Commission's dedication to understanding the child welfare system and the quality of life provided to children in the child welfare system has been further enhanced by the participation of a former foster youth in Commission activities.

During this reporting year, the Commission adopted the following preamble to guide our work on behalf of children and families:

*As members of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, we hold ourselves accountable to the Board of Supervisors and to the communities that they serve and from which we come. Although we are a diverse group of child advocates, we work collaboratively and are firmly united on our mission: furthering the well being of the children and families of Los Angeles County. The Commission has always believed that "children can't wait," and we therefore summon a sense of urgency and dedication to our duties. This is a voluntary assignment, but we are greatly rewarded through the intrinsic and passionate nature of the ongoing effort to improve lives.*

During FY 2002-03, the Department experienced a great deal of change with respect to leadership. The Commission, along with community partners and representatives, contributed to the selection process of the Department's Director through its participation in focus groups held by the Department to receive input about the characteristics necessary for a successful Director. We are pleased with the Board's appointment of Dr. David Sanders as the Department's new Director, and support his vision for children and families under the County's supervision. The Commission is looking forward to a collaborative partnership with the Department and all other County entities to improve the outcomes for children, families, and communities in Los Angeles County.

This Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors highlights the Commission's efforts in FY 2002-03 to address the challenges facing the County's child welfare system. The Commission is diligent in its review of programs administered by County Departments serving children and families. In doing so, involvement of consumers, community, and stakeholders continues to take place as we forge partnerships to improve our child welfare services delivery.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Adoptions

The Commission, through its Adoption Committee, has focused on examining barriers to achieving legal permanency for children under the supervision of the Department and the development of strategies to resolve them. In partnership with the Department as well as community stakeholders and advocates, particular attention was paid to the timeliness of the adoption process, barriers toward finalization, the implementation of concurrent planning, and the process by which termination of parental rights takes place.

The Commission, along with other key community stakeholders, was invited by the Department to participate in eight focus groups designed to receive feedback about their experiences with the adoption process and suggestions for its improvement. The Committee received a report of the outcome of the focus groups and the determination was made to create 12 workgroups specifically to develop strategies to address the areas of concerns and to create a more streamlined and integrative process toward legal permanency.

At the close of this reporting period, the workgroups continued to meet. The Commission will be receiving a presentation from the Adoption Division in the first quarter of FY 2003-04 to understand the strategies developed and the Department's plan for their comprehensive implementation.

### Education

The Commission continues to advocate for improving educational outcomes for all children and youth under the County's supervision. As identified in two previous Annual Reports, challenges must be overcome if children under the supervision of the Department are to have the educational experience that builds their knowledge and skills to help them become successful adults.

In partnership with the Department, the Commission co-chairs the Education Initiative. This joint Committee meets on a quarterly basis to deal with the many complex educational problems experienced by children while in foster care. The Commission continues to serve on the steering committee that oversees the administration of the Foster Youth Services Grant. This grant, administered by Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), provides individual educational counseling and services for youth (DCFS/Probation) residing in group homes. The system developed to collect records through this grant is serving as the model for the Helix Project (see Special Projects). In addition, the Committee has facilitated a dialogue between LAUSD and the Department to develop a contract that would provide seven school counselors to help foster children/youth under the care of the Department to attain positive educational outcomes. Efforts toward meeting the educational needs of foster youth were demonstrated in the Education Initiatives collaboration with the Foster Committee to develop the Health and Education

Binders so that accurate educational data is maintained for each child in the under the Department's supervision (see Foster Care).

In its advisory capacity, the Commission successfully encouraged the Board to support AB490 (Steinberg) that addresses the challenges foster youth experience in the educational setting. The provisions of this bill address school stability, transportation, enrollment, record collection and credit accumulation.

### Emancipation

As a result of the Emancipation Committee and the Commission's recommendations to the Board in July 2001, the emancipation program has been restructured to better meet the needs of emancipating youth in both the dependency and delinquency systems. Under the leadership of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Dr. Sharon Watson, a Design Team was established to develop a more comprehensive and effective program model to better prepare youth for independence. The Design Team members include the Commission, county agencies, emancipated foster youth, and community partners.

The accomplishments of the Design Team's efforts have resulted in improvements in housing, transitional services, monitoring, and training. Additionally, the Design Team ensured the creation and implementation of the County's first Emancipation Ombudsman in the Auditor-Controller's office and the development and implementation of a comprehensive Emancipation Website that provides critical resources to emancipating youth and their care providers. The budget and spending plans were completed for FY 2003-04.

While these accomplishments have made a great impact on the way in which dependency and delinquency systems work together toward preparing youth in their transition to independence, continued oversight is necessary to ensure the programs' ongoing success. A Governance Plan has been developed so that the improvements made are maintained, and the programs' efficacy and attainment of desired outcomes are reviewed and evaluated. The proposed governance structure would include a consolidation of the Commission's Emancipation Oversight Committee and the Design Team that would meet monthly, the establishment of a Community Council for each of the four Emancipation Program HUBs and quarterly Emancipation Program Community Forums.

The Commission is pleased with the achievements made in the area of emancipation services and looks forward to a continued partnership with the county agencies and community stakeholders as the Design Team plan works toward full implementation.

### Family Preservation/Family Support

The Commission and its designated Committee continues to stress the importance of evaluating the Family Preservation program. The evaluation of the program

became a reality this past reporting year. The Commission is pleased with the direction of the evaluation process as managed by Dr. Barbara Solomon. The Committee participates in the Evaluation workgroup as well as the Roundtable forum led by the Department. Additionally, the Commission has been invited to provide input as the Department begins to develop an RFP to comply with Promoting Safe and Stable Families legislation that will modify the current direction of the Family Preservation program.

### Foster Care

The Commission, through its Foster Care Committee, continued to work with the Department to ensure the implementation of the Foster Care Task Force Recommendations adopted by the Board. At the close of FY 2002-03, 16 of the original 25 recommendations were implemented. Subsets of the remaining recommendations are still pending implementation and are reliant upon the allocation of staff.

In addition to overseeing the implementation of the recommendations, the Foster Care Committee continued to focus on the development and distribution of the Health and Education Binder (Binder). The Binder is intended as a tool to assist care providers maintain health and education related information in a central and compact location that can accompany a foster youth each time replacement occurs. The Binder will contain vital information such as medical and dental records, assessments, prescriptions, report cards, and Individualized Education Plans. The Binder was designed through the efforts of many community partners, including foster and relative care providers and members of the Education Initiative Committee (See Education).

The Department has developed and implemented a strategic plan to ensure the Binders proper and effective maintenance and utilization. The strategic plan includes CSW and care provider training and supervision. At the close of this reporting period, approximately 92% of the Binders have been distributed. The Probation Department is considering utilizing a similar Binder for children/youth under their jurisdiction.

The Commission will continue to monitor the implementation of the remaining Task Force recommendations. These recommendations are of particular importance, as they will utilize the monitoring and tracking system in place to record incidents of abuse and neglect in foster care homes, and compliance with quality of life standards.

The Committee and the Commission are further concerned with the administration of psychotropic medication to foster youth and the monitoring of such medication once it has been prescribed. At the close of the reporting period, efforts were underway for the creation of a workgroup to be convened by the Presiding Judge of Dependency Court to address this issue.

### MacLaren Children's Center

During this fiscal year, the Commission continued to chair the MacLaren Children's Center (MCC) Committee, to address issues related to the appropriate delivery of health, mental health, and educational services. In addition to its committee, the Commission was a member of the Interagency Children's Services Consortium (Consortium), which served as an oversight body of the facility to implement strategies with respect to admissions, length of stay, safety, delivery of services, and administration.

This was an eventful year for MacLaren Children's Center. When the decision was made to close MCC, the Commission raised concern as to the availability of services in the community for MCC residents and high-risk youth. Some of the needs identified included: WRAPAROUND, therapeutic behavioral services, emergency placement resources, the receipt of SSI, Regional Center services, substance abuse services, and community placement availability.

When the Department chose to utilize the Reception Center Model as a means to address some of these issues, the Commission participated in a site visit to Contra Costa County. The Commission is participating in the Department's development of reception type facilities and discussion as to whether this approach will meet the needs of the MCC population. The Commission remains concerned about the lessons learned from the closure of the County's only emergency shelter and the sufficient development of appropriate resources to meet the needs of the County's most at-risk youth population.

### Relative Care

The Commission's Relative Care Committee continues to work with the Department to ensure that relatives and the children placed in their care receive appropriate services and support. The Committee includes the participation of relative providers and community stakeholders. During this fiscal year, the Committee focused a great deal of attention on the approval process of relative providers as outlined by the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and the January 15, 2002 implementation of AB1695. Committee members attended the community forums held in SPA 6, which were designed to inform relatives about the approval process and receive their feedback about the potential impact this new policy will have on their families. The Commission expressed concerns about the process employed by the Department to complete the initial assessment of relative homes. The Committee continues to be concerned with how this initiative is being coordinated within the Department and that all staff involved with relative providers are aware of the assessment process and guidelines necessary to make certain that corrective action plans are completed.

In addition to monitoring the ASFA process, the Committee continues to oversee the progress of the implementation of Recommendations identified in the Relative Care Taskforce Report approved by the Board. The Committee and the

Commission are pleased that as of the close of this reporting period all nine relative care liaisons are in place and working with relatives and the children in their care. In keeping with the support provided to relatives, the Committee's concern has also been to ensure that CSWs receive the necessary training to deal effectively with relative care issues and other needed community services. The Taskforce Report also pointed out the need relative providers have for respite care. Through the Kinship Support Services Program, some respite services were made available to relative providers through a community based agency as well as Department support services.

During the upcoming fiscal year, the Commission through the Relative Care Committee will focus on the increase of services and support throughout all SPAs for relative providers, examine current legislation to improve permanency options for relatives, continue to monitor the ASFA assessment process for all relative providers, including those who are undocumented, advocate for the allocation of resources within the Department's kinship division to adequately support relatives, and ensure that services are provided to KinGAP families similar to those offered to emancipated youth.

### 300/600 Taskforce

During this reporting period, the Commission continued to chair the 300/600 Taskforce Committee. The Committee continued to focus on the expansion of the Start Taking Action Responsibly Today (START) Units, as successfully advocated for in a memorandum dated December 5, 2001 to the Interagency Children's Services Consortium from the Commission supporting the long-range goal of having a unit in each of the eight Service Planning Areas (SPA).

The START Units use a multi-disciplinary approach to working with pre-delinquent and/or delinquent foster youth to prevent their entry into the delinquency system. The START Units represent a collaborative approach between the Department, Probation, and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) in working with dependent youth. At the close of this fiscal year, a START unit was put into operation in SPA 8 and a unit in SPA 2 was identified and will be implemented in the first quarter of FY 2003-04. With the addition of these two Units, the County will have a total of four START Units.

In June 2003 the 300/600 Taskforce Committee suspended its activity to participate in the Department's committee that took the leadership role in working with key stakeholders to focus on continued program expansion, outcome evaluation and funding options. The Commission will continue to play an active role in the oversight of this program.



### **Other Committees**

**In addition to the above-mentioned committees, other Commission committees include the Personnel Committee, the Nomination Committee and the Budget Committee. While the Personnel and Nomination Committees deal with the internal functions of the Commission, the Budget Committee works with the Department to provide input to the budgeting process.**

### **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

In addition to the work of the Commission through its many committees, Commissioners participate in special projects aimed at developing comprehensive services that impact all areas of well-being for children and families under the County's supervision. During this reporting period, Commissioners joined other county and community partners on the following activities:

#### **CWS Stakeholders Group**

**The Commission was represented in the CWS Stakeholders Group that was convened in 2000 and concluded its work on June 30, 2003. This diverse group was convened by Governor Gray Davis to examine the child welfare system in California to make recommendations for its improvement. In completing its work, the CWS Stakeholders Group presented 30 recommendations to be considered for the redesign of the child welfare system. Key to the implementation of the recommendations is the engagement of communities and stakeholders to understand and advance the proposed strategies. To that end, regional community forums were held throughout the State. The Commission co-sponsored the forum held in Los Angeles and participated in developing the format of the forum. The Commissioner appointed to the Stakeholder Group was a panel member at the Los Angeles Forum.**

#### **Education Summit**

**The Children's Law Center of Los Angeles hosted the First Annual Education Summit in May 2003. A Commissioner participated in the nine-month design phase leading to the Summit, which included participation from the Board, DCFS, LACOE, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), DMH, Probation, and a multitude of community partners. The purpose of the Summit was to begin a dialogue with all of the agencies that work with foster and delinquent youth to identify challenges, and possible reforms relating to the education of these youth. The Summit was comprised of several**

**breakout sessions, one of which was facilitated by a Commissioner. Recommendations are currently being compiled.**

Health and Education Internet Passport Initiative: HELIX Project

Over the last four years, the Commission has worked toward the development of an electronic passport system that would capture the critical health and education history of children/youth in the dependency and delinquency systems and provide appropriate agencies with access to this important information to better serve these youth. The Board has supported moving this initiative forward. As such, the Service Integration Branch (SIB) has taken the leadership role to bring together a number of county agencies (Probation, Chief Information Office, LAUSD, LACOE, Dept. of Health Services, DMH, and DCFS) as well as the Commission to ensure its development. This collaboration has resulted in an alternative technology solution- Health and Education Local Information Exchange (HELIX). The HELIX is a web-based portal application that will enhance the interagency exchange of health and education information for children and youth under the county's supervision. Each of these county agencies has entered into a collaborative agreement that will ensure the successful development, funding, support, and partnership necessary to bring the HELIX program into existence. This Commission will continue to work toward moving this project forward and ultimately to assist in making HELIX operational.

Mission Possible

The Commission is one of the partners in the Mission Possible pilot, established in 2001 and concluded in July 2003. Mission Possible developed a theme-based visual and performing arts program at juvenile camps in the Los Angeles County Probation System. During FY 2003-04, a request will be made for this successful pilot to be given permanent status. This joint collaboration includes the Commission, the Mental Health Commission, and the Probation Commission along with staff from LACOE.

**SPECIAL MEETINGS**

Essential to the Commission's ability to understand all facets of the child welfare system, the concerns held by community providers and service recipients, and to gain knowledge about the efforts taking place throughout the county and the state to improve the child welfare system, the Commission has participated in and attended the following special meetings.

California Child and Family Services Review

During this reporting period, the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families reviewed the State's conformance with Title IV-B and Title IV-E funding for child welfare and foster care activities to determine whether the identified outcomes were being achieved. The outcomes were measured in the areas of safety, permanency and child and family well-being.

As part of the assessment process, six Commissioners were interviewed to provide their insight on the child welfare system in Los Angeles County.

### Little Hoover Commission (LHC)

In November 2002, the Little Hoover Commission conducted a public hearing in Los Angeles to understand the challenges facing the State's child welfare system. A Commissioner, along with other key child welfare stakeholders in Los Angeles County, provided testimony to the LHC. The testimony provided on behalf of the Commission focused on the importance of achieving permanency for dependent youth as the only goal of the child welfare system. To reach this goal, the Commission recommended the development and implementation of programs to prevent children and families from entering the system, the creation of a service delivery model which is community-based; the evaluation of outcome indicators, and the use of technology as another means to ensure child safety and well-being.

### **COLLABORATIVES**

The Commission firmly believes that without community and multi-agency participation, the creation of a seamless system of care that provides optimal benefits and security to children and families at risk is not possible. In keeping with this belief, the Commission views itself as a community partner that has representation on various other commissions and planning groups designed to coordinate services throughout the County to improve outcomes for children and families in Los Angeles County. Commissioners serve as a representative on each of the following organizations:

- Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group
- Children's Court Parking Fee Committee
- Children's Planning Council
- Family Group Decision Making Oversight Committee
- First 5 LA
- First 5 LA Universal Pre-School Advisory Committee
- Interagency Children's Services Consortium
- Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care
- Metropolitan State Hospital Youth Steering Committee
- Service Integration Action Plan