

Child & Family Visit Center:

Overview

Our Visit Center combines a community center within a home-like environment where families build trust, improve parenting, and find empowerment on their path to well-being.

Challenge

Meaningful family time with child and family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of successful reunification in Child Welfare. Families separated due to abuse and neglect are on a path to rebuild; relationships, confidence, trust, and most critically, parent-child bonds. Our challenge: Families in our CWS system were limited in visitation location options. The safest location was in CWS offices. 30 - 50 families visited weekly in one of three offices fashioned into tiny visit quarters. Staff and client morale were dampened by the constant juxtaposition of energetic family time space alongside the fast-paced demands of crisis work while families were silenced around how to bond during their family time. Families deserve to participate in how they connect, learn, and build resiliency together in space that is safe, comforting, and fun. Children deserve to connect with their family naturally and to thrive.

Solution

The model was built on a philosophy of improved access, empowerment, and connection to resources. The creation of a holistic visit center alongside Behavioral Health partners required the collaborative efforts of community partners providing parenting education, public health nursing, transportation, visit coaching, volunteering, parent leadership and mentorship. A PH Nurse mingles and offers breastfeeding support while our Foster Care Liaison connects parents with resource families, creating a wider circle of support for every foster child. SnapEd staff leads healthy food prep classes while Visit Coaches guide family time experiences where everyone is engaged and learning so that children can safely return home. Behavioral Health Clinicians positioned onsite provide support while AmeriCorps Family Support Aides facilitate Nurturing Parenting sessions and respond to high risk family needs through home visiting and referral support. Families build a network that walks alongside them throughout their CWS experience and into a safer, more resilient future. To achieve our goals, we secured an unutilized County-owned hospital facility and together, with our community partners and parents, created the Child and Family Visit Center. What appeared to be an insurmountable

hurdle to transform the sterile environment became a warm, inviting space to rock babies, play, and bond.

We imagined if a home or homelike setting could be secured, it could be staffed with individuals focused on family-driven family time programming. To fully engage families on the path to recovery and success through the CWS system, we created a family center. If a family could reduce isolation, find solace in meeting others going through similar life changes, and could be a part of that community as peer leaders, then we could truly break chains and build a resilient village, one family at a time. This would require partnerships, volunteers, leaders, parent mentors, and service organizations to see this vision through. Local Soroptimists fashioned a full kitchen for families while a Chamber of Commerce Leadership class built a backyard wonderland. High School seniors volunteer as part of their senior projects each year. Successful CWS Parent Partners are identified and trained. Family orientations are held to demystify the CWS path early on and to connect families to supports right away. Connection, partnership, and shared power have been the mantra in our innovative Visit Center program.

122 visits are managed through the Visit Center every week totaling over 65 hours *per day* of supportive activity; transportation, coaching, monitoring, feedback and engagement. Caregivers and families connect to support reunification. Successful parents join our team to mentor new families as *Parent Partners* and AmeriCorps volunteers. We build resilient families together. Community volunteers create a network of support that is homegrown and carries through into the family's future as they transition toward safety, permanency and well-being.

To find an unutilized county owned facility or house, shift family programming staff, build a cadre of volunteers and contract with AmeriCorps are replicable in counties of all sizes. Through grants, we have found we can develop new modes of engagement with families such as Visit Coaching that reflect best practice and are driven by values set in the Core Practice Model for California's Child Welfare Services.

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Results

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Project Contact