

The Welfare of Child Welfare: Comparison of Budgets

Synopsis

This report compares the Child Welfare Services (CWS) budget of Santa Cruz County to those of four other counties considered demographically similar to Santa Cruz County. Three of the four other counties spent more than twice as much per child as Santa Cruz County.

Definitions

Active Cases: all children who had an open investigation in the Emergency Response category, or an open case in the remaining three categories of Family Maintenance, Family Reunification or Permanency Planning. Active cases do not include children who were referred but whose situation did not meet the criteria for investigation. In other words, they were “evaluated out.” Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanency Planning are industry-standard categories set up by the State of California. All children served by Child Welfare Services fall into one of these categories.

Overmatch: the portion of the total CWS budget for any county contributed solely by that county that is above 30 percent of the minimum total CWS budget established for that county by the State of California

Background

In Santa Cruz County, Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a division of the Human Resources Agency. Child Welfare Services, more commonly known as Child Protective Services, investigates and intervenes when necessary when child abuse or neglect is reported.

The Santa Cruz County CWS budget, like that of other counties, has suffered because of funding shortages. This investigation examined how Santa Cruz County’s CWS budget compared to those of comparison counties. To fulfill its mandate to protect children from neglect or abuse, CWS must have funds available.

The Grand Jury requested data from seven counties whose demographics are considered to be similar to those of Santa Cruz County. Of those seven counties, four replied with data in the format that allowed us to compare it to that of Santa Cruz County. The Grand

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Jury would like to express its appreciation to the seven counties for their assistance in providing information for this report.

Scope

This investigation examined five aspects of the Santa Cruz County budget for Child Welfare Services (CWS):

- the annual total budget for Santa Cruz County CWS
- the county share of the annual budget for Santa Cruz County CWS
- the number of active cases per year for Santa Cruz County CWS
- how the total budget dollars compare to those of other counties
- how the county share budget dollars compare to those of other counties

Sources

Interviewed:

CASA of Santa Cruz County.
Marin County Adult and Children's Social Services.
Monterey County Family and Child Services.
Napa County Children's Behavioral Health.
San Mateo County Health Services Agency.
Santa Clara County Family and Children's Services.
Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency personnel.
Santa Cruz County Personnel Department.
Solano County Child Welfare Services.
Sonoma County Human Services Department.

Reviewed:

California Quick Facts, from U.S. Census Bureau web site,
<http://quickfacts.census.gov>.
Child Welfare Services Reports for California, from University of California at
Berkeley Center for Social Services Research web site,
<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>.
Child Welfare Services, Self-Assessment, Santa Cruz County, 2004.
Child Welfare Services, System Improvement Plan, 2004.

Findings

1. The State of California determines a minimum total CWS budget for each county.
Some factors that influence the total minimum budget are:

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- number of children served;
- cost to employ qualified social workers (as determined by the state); and
- state ratios for number of social workers to children in need of services.

Of this minimum required budget, the state contributes 70 percent and mandates that counties contribute 30 percent as a county share of the total CWS budget. Monies contributed by counties to their CWS budgets above the minimum required share are supplemented by other monies from state and federal sources. The resulting increased budget may not reflect the 70:30 budget contribution ratio.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

2. Some counties supplement their CWS budget with additional state, federal and other monies. Santa Cruz County CWS has been able to access some of these funds.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

3. In 2002-2003, Santa Cruz County overmatched the required minimum share of the CWS budget by \$696,152. In 2003-2004, Santa Cruz County overmatched the required share of the minimum CWS budget by \$718,541.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

4. CWS budgets, county shares of these budgets, number of active cases and budget-to-child ratios vary from county to county.

	<i>Fiscal Year 2002-2003</i>	<i>Fiscal Year 2003-2004</i>
Santa Cruz County Population: 251,584		
Number of Active Cases	687	809
Total CWS Budget	\$8,246,650	\$9,002,816
County Share Budget	\$1,538,957	\$1,497,975
Total Budget Per Child	\$12,004	\$11,128
County Share Budget Per Child	\$2,240	\$1,852

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County A		
Population: 246, 073		
Number of Active Cases	470	391
Total CWS Budget	\$3,917,501	\$4,778,564
County Share Budget	\$701,473	\$967,956
Total Budget Per Child	\$8,335	\$12,221
County Share Budget Per Child	\$1,493	\$2,476
County B		
Population: 1,678,421		
Number of Active Cases	5,638	5,242
Total CWS Budget	\$202,603,417	\$214,665,827
County Share Budget	\$56,017,081	\$52,586,883
Total Budget Per Child	\$35,936	\$40,951
County Share Budget Per Child	\$9,936	\$10,032
County C		
Population: 697,456		
Number of Active Cases	1,175	1,216
Total CWS Budget	\$29,555,012	\$31,736,859
County Share Budget	\$5,346,921	\$7,453,884
Total Budget Per Child	\$25,153	\$26,099
County Share Budget Per Child	\$4,551	\$6,130

County D Population: 131,607		
Number of Active Cases	251	227
Total CWS Budget	\$8,523,987	\$8,275,200
County Share Budget	\$779,255	\$820,399
Total Budget Per Child	\$33,960	\$36,455
County Share Budget Per Child	\$3,105	\$3,614

Note: The total CWS budget number includes the 30 percent county share of the minimum budget, the 70 percent state share of the minimum budget and all additional county, state, federal and other dollars contributed to the CWS budget regardless of source.

The populations of each county are 2003 US Census Bureau estimates.¹

Table 1: Child Welfare Services Dollars Per Child Comparison.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

In comparing the budgets across counties, it is important to keep in mind that there is significant variation from county to county in the amount of revenue available from taxes, fees and other county-specific sources to supplement the state’s allocation for CWS.

5. The Grand Jury also researched information from the UC Berkeley “Point in Time” studies found on the UC Berkeley web site. This information, although very thorough in reporting data by children’s ages, caseloads of social workers and numbers of children in each category, is derived from the data of a single given day for each quarter.²

Conclusions

1. The County of Santa Cruz has contributed more than the required county share to the CWS budget for fiscal years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, resulting in additional total CWS budget dollars.
2. For fiscal year 2002-2003, Santa Cruz County CWS had significantly less total money budgeted than three of the four counties studied and more budgeted than the fourth county in comparison to the number of active cases.

¹ California Quick Facts, from US Census Bureau web site, <http://quickfacts.census.gov>.

² Child Welfare Services Reports for California, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research web site, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>.

3. For fiscal year 2003-2004, Santa Cruz County CWS had less total money budgeted than the four counties in comparison to the number of active cases.
4. For fiscal year 2002-2003, Santa Cruz County CWS had less county share money budgeted than three of the four counties studied and more budgeted than the fourth county in comparison to the number of active cases.
5. For fiscal year 2003-2004, Santa Cruz County CWS had less county share money budgeted than the four counties in comparison to the number of active cases.
6. Compared to other counties, Santa Cruz County CWS has less funds available to serve an increasing number of active cases.
7. The UC Berkeley “Point in Time” studies do not reflect an annualized number of children served which the Grand Jury believes were needed for this budget analysis.

Recommendations

1. Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency personnel, along with the Board of Supervisors, should be commended for overmatching the required share of the County of Santa Cruz CWS budget.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

The County appreciates and concurs with the Grand Jury’s commendation.

2. The County of Santa Cruz should explore other options for obtaining additional money to supplement Child Welfare Services funds.

Response: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors AGREES.

The recommendation has been implemented. The HRA budget approved by the Board of Supervisors in June 2005 provided for the addition of five new social work positions, a social work supervisor, and a program manager to the Family and Children’s Services Division. HRA, in collaboration with public and private agency partners, regularly explores various options for obtaining additional money to supplement CWS funds. For example, in FY 2004/05, HRA collaborated with the Health Services Agency Alcohol and Drug Program to apply successfully for approximately \$100,000 of state funds to operate a Dependency Drug Court program to provide specialized services to alcohol and drug-abusing parents of children under age 5 who are in out-of-home placement due to parental neglect or abuse. In the first quarter of FY 2005/06, HRA has applied for nearly \$1 million in State Child Welfare Services Outcome Improvement funds, and \$1.9 million in federal funds under the Abandoned Infants Act to provide specialized prevention/early intervention services to substance-abusing families with young children. The Board of Supervisors and HRA are committed to improving and enhancing services to Santa Cruz County’s families and children, and will continue to work together to seek out opportunities to do so.

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Responses Required

<i>Entity</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Respond Within</i>
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	1-4	1, 2	60 Days (August 30, 2005)
Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency	1-4	1, 2	90 Days (September 30, 2005)

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