

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH
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**Expanding Near-Peer Mentorship for Youth with Complex Care Needs in
Temporary Shelter Care Facilities**

The California Department of Social Services defines youth with complex needs as youth who have various identified unmet needs across multiple domains including behavioral health, child welfare, probation, education, and other systems. Consequently, these youth need high intensity, individualized treatment options to better resolve challenges and address their needs.

In Los Angeles County, the Office of Child Protection (OCP) continues to work in partnership with child- and family-serving departments to implement solutions to address the complex needs of these youth based on recommendations from the Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) Task Force, which was convened by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Department of Mental Health (DMH), Probation, and OCP. The STRTP Task Force submitted its [recommendations](#) to the Board of Supervisors in June 2021.

On March 7, 2023, at the request of the Board of Supervisors and the Chief Executive Officer, the OCP and DCFS submitted a multiagency report – [the 30-Day](#)

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[Report Back on Placements and Interventions for Youth in Foster Care with the Highest Complex Needs](#) – with further recommendations to enhance interventions and supports for youth with complex needs. More recently, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion from Supervisors Barger and Hahn, [Supports for Youth with Complex Care Needs](#), to address placement instability and crisis response for youth with the highest acuity needs.

One of the throughlines across these efforts is the need to build a robust continuum of care that includes peer support and mentorship for youth. Multiple stakeholders and young people with lived experience have expressed a desire and critical need for peer support and mentorship to provide the essential connection and support youth need to thrive and stabilize them in a placement setting, within their families, and within their communities.

In late 2021, a group of system partners came together to explore opportunities to support DCFS in providing more crisis intervention and supports for young people in Temporary Shelter Care Facilities (TSCFs). Young people and TSCF staff were experiencing an increase in conflict, violence, and instability, and there was a lack of activities, services, and support to address those behaviors and prevent crisis escalation or justice system involvement effectively and equitably.

This group determined that a peer or near-peer mentorship model delivered by those with lived experience would be an ideal fit to support young people in TSCFs. The near-peer model is rooted in providing mentors who are close in age and have enough shared experiences to enable a connection with youth on a deeper level.

In the fall of 2022, Casey Family Programs (Casey) reached out to Castillo Consulting Partners (CCP) with a request to pilot a near-peer mentorship program for youth in DCFS' TSCFs. CCP worked with Casey and DCFS to design and pilot a program that launched with one demonstration site in October 2022.

Over the course of the demonstration, CCP's near-peer mentors have had the opportunity to engage and build relationships with the youth at one of DCFS' TSCFs. Through this near-peer mentorship, young people have received authentic guidance and support from individuals who share common life experiences. Near-peer mentors are an especially important resource for young people that encourages their ability to build lifelong supports and address barriers to success. CCP mentors are trained in building trust, conflict resolution, crisis intervention, and trauma-responsive approaches to mentorship. As a strategy for prevention and early intervention, mentorship has been shown to lead to heightened self-esteem, the development of effective coping mechanisms, meaningful social support, and better outcomes for participants.

Youth from some of our most vulnerable communities, including the youth in DCFS' TSCFs, often have some of the most complex needs and least number of outside connections and support. Prior to the design and implementation of the CCP mentorship demonstration project, transition age youth and young adults disparately experienced undesirable and adverse outcomes due to challenges within the foster care system to provide adequate support, connection to services, and long-term relationships that support the personal bonds necessary for these youth to thrive.

CCP has shown successful outcomes over the course of their demonstration project. Although there are other mentorship programs, CCP has experience supporting TSCF youth and have an established relationship with the youth and DCFS. Their current work has been supported and funded by Casey Family Programs and was recently expanded to one more TSCF site using Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) State Block Grant funds. However, the need to scale this pilot to all DCFS TSCF sites as a full-time program is critical, given the ongoing placement capacity challenges the County faces for our youth with the most complex needs, many of whom are repeat or overstays

at the TSCFs. It would be challenging to solicit and contract with a provider familiar with DCFS and the TSCF youth population given the urgency of the need. CCP can work in direct partnership with OCP, DCFS and Casey to provide customized support that yields powerful outcomes for the youth in TSCFs.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to enter into a sole source contract with Castillo Consulting Partners (CCP) for a term of one (1) year to expand their near-peer mentorship pilot to all DCFS Temporary Shelter Care Facilities. DCFS will work with CCP, in collaboration with the Office of Child Protection (OCP), to develop a scope of work and clear deliverables for this pilot.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of DCFS, or designee, to exercise options to extend the contract with two one-year extensions, by written notification to CCP, contingent upon (a) availability of funding; (b) approval by County Counsel; and (c) the Director of DCFS, or designee, notifies the Board and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in writing within ten days of such execution.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of DCFS, or designee, to execute amendments to increase or decrease the funding amount for the contract by no more than ten percent during the term of the contract to accommodate increases or decreases in services, provided: (a) the amendments do not include cost of living adjustment; (b) sufficient funding is available for increases; (c) approval by County Counsel; and (d) the Director of DCFS, or designee, notifies the Board and the CEO in writing within ten days of the execution of such amendment.

4. Delegate authority to the Director of DCFS, or designee, to negotiate and execute amendments to the contract with CCP for changes that pertain to any mergers, acquisitions, or changes in ownership, and for any revisions required by changes in local, state, and federal regulations; or for necessary changes to meet the needs of DCFS. The approval of County Counsel will be obtained for any of the aforementioned situations prior to executing any amendments, and DCFS will notify the Board and CEO in writing within ten days of the execution of such amendment.
5. Delegate authority to the Director of DCFS, or designee, to terminate the contract for contractor's default, County's convenience, or if contractor initiates termination for convenience, provided that: (a) County Counsel approval is obtained prior to termination of the agreement; and (b) the Director of DCFS, or designee, notifies the Board and CEO in writing within ten business days of terminating the Contract.
6. Direct the OCP and DCFS to collaborate with the Departments of Mental Health (DMH), Probation, Youth Development (DYD), Economic Opportunity (DEO), Public Health (DPH), and Health Services (DHS) to identify funding streams and strategies to expand and sustain mentoring, peer/near-peer support, credible messenger, and other similar programs for child welfare and justice-involved children and youth.

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