

**Solano County Health & Social Services Department**  
**Foster Care Home Inspection and Licensing**  
**2007-2008 Solano County Grand Jury**

**Reason for Investigation**

Under the authority of Penal Code section 925, the 2007-2008 Grand Jury elected to investigate the Foster Care Home Inspection and Licensing Unit process within the Solano County Health & Social Services Department.

**Grand Jury Actions**

- Interviewed the Child Welfare Services Division Licensing Unit's family development specialist
- Interviewed Licensing Unit Social Workers
- Reviewed the State of California Manual of Policies and Procedures for Foster Family Homes
- Reviewed Solano County's Foster Family Home Application
- Attended a presentation by the Health & Social Services Department Director and staff about Child Welfare Services
- Attended a Foster Family Orientation

**Background/Summary**

Foster care provides temporary homes for abused, neglected, or abandoned children or children who are at risk and unable to remain safely in their homes. Foster Families in Solano County are now referred to as "Resource Families." The Resource Family does not replace biological parents but works in cooperation with those parents who have a child in out-of-home care. The Resource Families' support includes:

- Meeting with family and community support persons while a child is in their care
- Creating a permanent and lifelong connection between the child's past, present and future experiences
- Teaming with parents, social workers and the community

There are approximately 85,540 children in foster care in the State of California. At the time of our investigation, there were 123 foster homes licensed by Solano County. A lack of foster homes has resulted in approximately 60 Solano County foster children being placed outside the County. Solano County is actively recruiting for additional Resource Families.

To become a foster parent in Solano County, you must be a resident of the County and undergo a criminal background investigation, including fingerprinting. Applicants must be trained and licensed by the County and the license is renewed annually. If the applicant moves to a different address, the license is no longer valid and the applicant must re-apply for a new license. Those who eventually want to become adoptive parents, must first become licensed.

The licensing application process is divided into Section A for home licensing and Section B for the evaluation of the potential Resource Family before child placement.

## **Section A**

Section A begins the process for licensing of the home, which involves attending a foster care orientation, having a home safety inspection and completing the application process as follows:

- Application for a Foster Family Home License (LIC 283) – Identifies applicants and home for licensing
- Applicant Information (LIC 215) – Personal information about the applicant, i.e., identification, education, experience, references, etc.
- Criminal Record Statement (LIC 508) – Requires applicants to disclose any criminal convictions
- Fingerprint Submission – The County Licensing Office will provide applicants with instruction on how to submit fingerprints
- Control of Property – Applicants are required to provide proof of control of property at the time of application (examples: copy of utility bill, insurance statement, California Drivers License, rental or lease agreement, etc.)
- Verification of completion of an orientation provided by Solano County
- Emergency Plan for Foster Family Homes (LIC 610B) – Plan developed by applicant to enable the caregiver to handle any emergency that may arise and to protect the safety and well-being of all children

After the completion of Section A, a Licensing Program Analyst from the Licensing Unit for the Child Welfare Services division will make an in-home inspection to determine that all licensing requirements have been met. The analyst conducts the inspection using a checklist of health and safety standards for approval of family caregiver homes. Some of the inspection requirements include: firearms and other dangerous substances and items must be stored where they are inaccessible to children; smoke detectors or fire sprinklers must be installed; the home must be clean, safe, sanitary and in good repair.

An important part of the inspection process is adequate bedroom space. No more than two children can share a bedroom. Children of the opposite sex cannot share a bedroom unless each child is under five years of age. Children do not share a bedroom with an adult unless the child is an infant. Rooms commonly used for other purposes may not be used as bedrooms. Each child must have an individual bed with clean linens, pillow, blankets and a mattress in good repair. Each bedroom must have sufficient portable or permanent closet and drawer space for each child.

At the time of the inspection, the Emergency Plan must be posted in the home for viewing by the analyst. After the home is approved, the license is issued. If there are any deficiencies at the time of inspection, they must be corrected before the license can be issued.

## **Section B**

Section B of the licensing process involves the evaluation of the Resource Family prior to placement of children. It also establishes caregiver qualifications. Section B must be satisfactorily completed before a Resource Family is eligible to have a dependent child placed in the home.

Licensing placement application documents include the following:

- Health Screening (LIC 503) - To be completed by or under the direction of a physician verifying the health of the applicants and household helpers to effectively perform duties as required

- Verification of completion or enrollment in 12 hours of foster parent training, first aid and age appropriate CPR course, verification of additional training or experience
- Provide letters of reference, course transcripts, degrees and other supporting documents
- If water for human consumption is from a private source, submit evidence of on-site inspection of the source of the water and a bacteriological analysis by a local or state health department or other qualified public or private laboratory, which establishes the safety of water
- Local Fire Inspection Authority Information (LIC 9054) – To be completed by applicant, who intends to serve children that are non-ambulatory, disabled or require special health care needs

Applicants must complete the Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE) training program. Although the State requires only 12 hours of foster parent training, the PRIDE training provided in Solano County is a nine week, 27 hour program. The classes are weekly sessions of three hours per session and attendance at each class is mandatory.

A child from Solano County cannot be placed in a licensed home until Part B is completed. However, a child from another County could be placed in the licensed home. Solano County does not keep official records of these out-of-county placements.

After both Section A and B of the application process are completed, the Resource Family is ready for placement of a child or children.

There is no application fee to become a Solano County licensed foster home. An applicant is required to independently obtain health screening and First Aid/CPR certifications, which can cost approximately \$60.00 per person. To defray this cost, the County provided training at the annual Foster Parent Conference last year and this year.

To be a resource or adoptive parent, you can be single, in a committed relationship, married, or widowed. You do not have to have children of your own before becoming a Resource Family or adoptive parent. You must have sufficient funds to care for your needs. Funds are provided to care for the child's needs. Resource families are not required to own a home. In 2006 and 2007, 105 foster care and adoptive parents completed Part A of the licensing application process. Those completing both Section A and B totaled 47.

The County's licensing staff makes annual home visits to licensed homes. Families are required to provide information regarding the current family composition, which would include any out-of-county children placed in the home. The annual visits are for license renewal and require a home safety check and completion of additional training hours. When out-of-county children reside in Solano County licensed homes, medical, counseling, visitation and other support services are provided by the County placing the children. This could be an inconvenience to the Resource Family with children placed from out-of-county.

### **Basic Rates and Costs**

Foster care providers receive maintenance on behalf of the child for board and care, food, clothing, daily supervision, school supplies, personal incidentals, liability insurance, and travel to visit the child's biological parents. Costs vary based on the needs of the children and where they are placed. Payment levels also vary with the age of the child, with the lowest rates paid for children under four years of age and increasing incrementally up to age 20.

The Basic Monthly Rate schedule effective January 1, 2008 is as follows:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Cost</b>
0 – 4 yrs	\$ 446
5 – 8 yrs	485
9 – 11 yrs	519
12 -14 yrs	573
15 + yrs	627

The California Department of Social Services sets monthly rates for foster care facilities. Rates increase as the level of care or treatment becomes more specialized.

Solano County sometimes places children through independent Foster Family agencies. These agencies license and train their own foster families. Placement through a Foster Family agency is an increased cost to the County at more than double the rates for Resource Families licensed through Solano County. When the County is unable to match a child within a Solano County licensed home, it uses an independent agency for placement. Some reasons include: language requirements, multiple siblings, weekly meetings with a social worker, specialized contacts with families and a shortage of licensed homes in Solano County.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 1** - In 2006 and 2007, of the 105 foster parent applicants who completed Section A, only 47 completed Sections A and B of the licensing process.

**Recommendation 1** - To increase the success rate, the Solano County Health and Social Services Department should research reasons for the non-completion of Section B of the licensing process.

**Finding 2** - There is a shortage of foster homes in Solano County. Children often are placed outside of the County or with independent agencies.

**Recommendation 2** - Solano County Health and Social Services Department should conduct more advertising through community outreach to attract potential foster families.

**Finding 3** - The use of independent Foster Family Agencies due to special placement needs more than doubles the County's cost.

**Recommendation 3** - Use the Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE) program to include specialized training to accommodate children with special placement needs such as language requirements, multiple siblings or similar needs.

### **Comments**

The 2007-2008 Solano County Grand Jury commends the members of the Foster Care Home Inspection and Licensing Unit for their professionalism and dedication to the children of Solano County.

## **Affected Agencies**

- Solano County Health and Social Services Department
- Solano County Board of Supervisors