



Investing in the Future of L.A.'s Most At-Risk Children

Data on Needs and Resources for Preschool Children Involved with Child Welfare and Probation

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Background

Even though the number of children served by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is much lower than in previous years, a very large number of young children and families “flow through” the child welfare system in Los Angeles County each year. A better understanding of the overall caseload—as well as the flow of services as new cases are opened, children are placed temporarily, and permanency determinations are made—should be helpful in planning for system improvements. The Education Coordinating Council (ECC) has worked closely with DCFS’s Bureau of Information Services, E-Government and E-Commerce Division to analyze data that may be useful in improving linkages with early care and education services. The Probation Department also provided data from several surveys of pregnant and parenting youth, including the most recent survey completed in October 2007. In addition, the ECC received data from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and from Community Care Licensing. This report describes key findings based on analyses of five data sets:

1. Data on the total DCFS caseload of all young children under age six (an unduplicated count) served in calendar year 2006. This included children with open cases from previous years as of January 1, 2006, as well as all cases opened during 2006.
2. Data on two cohorts of young children under age six who entered DCFS in fiscal years 2004–05 and 2005–06
3. Data on licensed child care spaces in Los Angeles County provided by the Community Care Licensing Division of the California State Department of Social Services
4. Data from surveys of Probation youth on parenting and pregnancy
5. Data on child care usage by families receiving Women, Infants and Children nutrition services provided by the Public Health Foundation Enterprises WIC (PHFE-WIC), a county-wide consortium of WIC programs funded by First 5 LA to analyze aggregate data (<http://www.lawicdata.org>).

Two approaches to DCFS data were used to inform the findings of this report. The total caseload count for 2006 underlines the volume of need and demand for child welfare services, both countywide and in different geographic areas. Data on cohorts of children help to focus attention on new entries into the system during particular time periods. Cohort analysis is especially useful in understanding the flow of cases and new demands that must be met by social workers and their community-based partners. This approach is also useful for in-depth analyses of changing needs and demographics in different communities, and for assessing the impact of new system policies and practices. Cohort analyses can determine the extent to which changes in policy, information-sharing, resource management, and/or staff training have an effect over time. Because the numbers are smaller and the time frame is condensed, cohort analyses can also provide more useful

information on the movement of children between home and various placement settings. Placement patterns are, by definition, difficult to summarize in a system that responds differently to the circumstances of each individual child and family, but the data on these two recent cohorts of children help to show where attention may be most needed.

Findings

1. DCFS can facilitate access to high-quality early childhood education and family support services for a very large number of vulnerable children and their caregivers.

An unduplicated count of all children under age six whose families had open DCFS cases in 2006 shows that **20,203 young children** came to the attention of child welfare services that year. Figure 1 shows the concentration of children in different Service Planning Areas (SPAs), with SPA 6 serving the largest number of young children (n=3,864). DCFS also supplied data on children served by other special units that were not included in the SPA counts, with the largest number (n=1,866) being served by Adoption staff searching for permanent adoptive families for these very young children.

Figure 1

Age of Young Children in the DCFS Caseload by Region of Service, 2006							
Area	< Age 1	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Total
SPA 1	372	253	222	237	224	245	1,553
SPA 2	522	417	315	312	307	326	2,301
SPA 3	572	438	450	425	391	411	2,817
SPA 4	395	248	204	207	184	191	1,429
SPA 5	80	55	35	36	49	46	304
SPA 6	386	647	600	530	539	562	3,864
SPA 7	596	430	395	345	361	353	2,480
SPA 8	531	417	381	361	360	376	2,528
Adoption	254	400	412	294	277	229	1,866
CPH/ERCP	5	2	4	4	2	3	20
FFU/it	17	8	9	7	4	6	51
Latino Family	22	25	27	29	24	45	172
MART	11	5	11	8	3	5	43
SP	193	114	135	110	97	126	775
Total	4,356	3,439	3,201	2,905	2,822	2,930	20,203

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

Cohort data from FY 2004–05 illustrate the new demands on the system each year, with a total of 8,468 children under age six entering the DCFS system between July 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005. Data from the following year show a similar demand, with a cohort of 8,546 young children entering DCFS in FY 2005–06.

2. **Many of the children entering the DCFS system are infants under one year of age who have intensive needs for high-quality child care. Since Los Angeles County's early childhood education system already has shortages in the area of infant care, this may be a particularly difficult need to meet.**

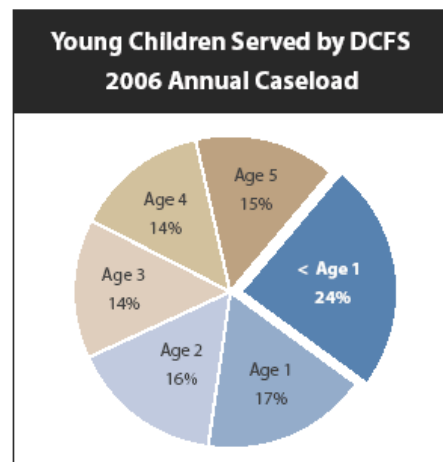
Data on young children served by DCFS in 2006 includes their ages at their point of entry into the DCFS system (Figure 2). These data show that the largest group—almost a quarter or 24% (n=4,856)—were infants less than a year old. The ages of the other children were spread almost evenly: 17% were a year old, 16% were age two, 14% were age three, 14% were age four, and 15% were age five.

Among the 2004–05 cohort of young children, about a third (33.8%) were less than a year old. The 2005–06 cohort showed the same pattern, with about a third being infants less than one year old.

This concentration of very young children highlights a potential mismatch between the resource needs of DCFS families caring for infants and the current lack of spaces in infant care programs throughout the county.

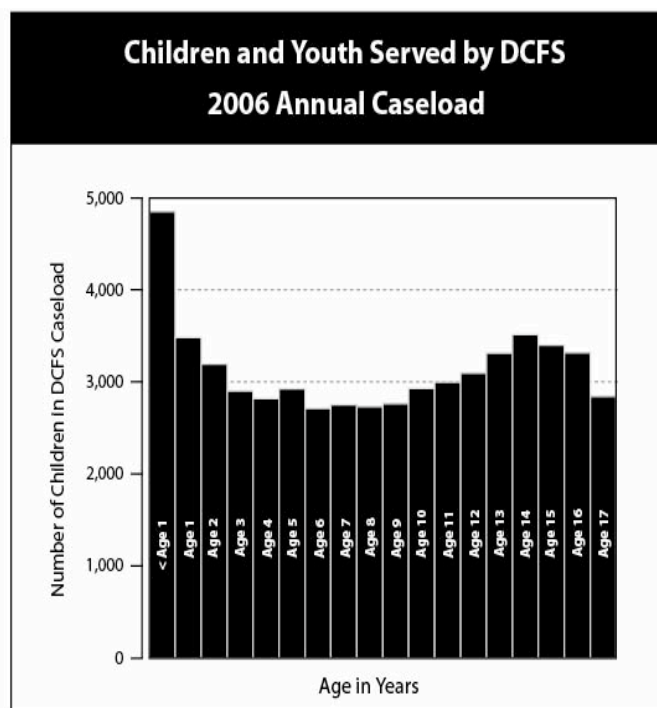
Data on the entire DCFS caseload in 2006 (Figure 3) help to illustrate the significant overall representation of very young children. The age distribution of DCFS clients during that year shows the large numbers of infants and toddlers, as well as teenagers between 13 and 16, who are served by DCFS offices and their community partners.

Figure 2



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

Figure 3

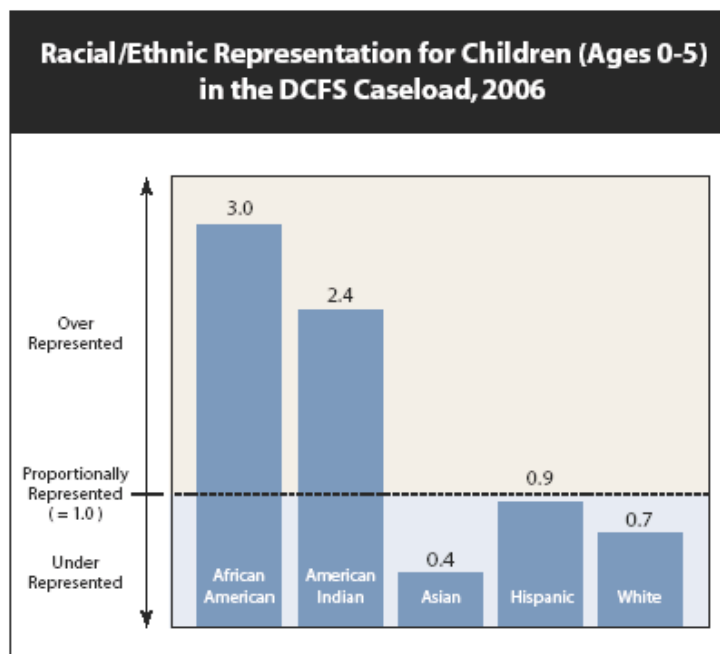


Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

3. **Not surprisingly, given previous analyses of the ethnic and racial composition of the families who come to the attention of child welfare, young children from some groups are over-represented in the DCFS population. The disproportionate numbers of African-American children who are served by child welfare is most significant, but other groups of young children are also over-represented.**

Although child abuse and neglect occurs in families of all kinds, children of color are more likely to become wards of county child welfare service systems. In 2006, young African-American children were significantly over-represented in the Los Angeles County DCFS caseload, with three times more Black children having open DCFS cases than would be expected based on the population as a whole. The 4,875 African-American children served in 2006 accounted for 24% of all young children served by DCFS that year. Figure 4 shows that Black children were over-represented by about three to one in the 2006 DCFS caseload.

Figure 4



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

Although their numbers are much smaller, American Indian children were also over-represented in 2006, with young American Indian children more than twice as likely to come to the attention of DCFS. Cohort data on children who entered DCFS care in both 2004–05 and 2005–06 showed similar patterns, with disproportionate numbers of Black and American Indian children entering the DCFS system.

Figure 5 on page 5 shows the number of children from the many different racial and ethnic groups living in Los Angeles County who were served by DCFS in 2006. The data also highlight which of the four DCFS service types were serving these children at the point of data collection—emergency response (ER), family maintenance (FM), family reunification (FR), and permanent placement (PP).

Data on the primary languages spoken by DCFS children and families show that almost three-quarters of families served in 2006 spoke English, with another 25% speaking Spanish.

Figure 5

Race/Ethnicity of Children (Ages 0-5) in the DCFS Caseload by Type of Service, 2006						
Race/Ethnicity (Ages 0-5)	Emergency Response	Family Maintenance	Family Reunification	Permanent Placement	Not Specified	Total
Alaskan Native	0	0	0	1	0	1
American Indian	4	33	22	32	0	91
Asian Indian	0	12	6	4	0	22
Black	186	1,652	1,250	1,787	0	4,875
Cambodian	3	75	16	21	0	115
Caribbean	0	10	0	3	0	13
Central American	2	18	21	9	0	50
Chinese	1	102	9	4	0	116
Ethiopian	0	2	0	1	0	3
Filipino	8	78	26	27	0	139
Guamanian	0	0	0	3	0	3
Hawaiian	0	6	6	7	0	19
Hispanic	403	5,449	2,862	2,434	4	11,152
Hmong	0	1	0	0	0	1
Japanese	1	14	5	2	0	22
Korean	1	39	6	7	0	53
Laotian	0	9	4	3	0	16
Mexican	20	186	66	90	0	362
Other Asian/Pacific Islander	2	30	13	17	0	62
Polynesian	0	1	2	0	0	3
Samoaan	0	27	27	13	0	67
South American	0	5	0	0	0	5
Vietnamese	1	68	7	9	0	85
White	102	1,124	750	839	1	2,816
Unspecified	30	36	28	18	0	112
Total	764	8,977	5,126	5,331	5	20,203

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

4. All the young children served by DCFS may have enhanced needs for early care and education services, but the concentration of young children in some geographic areas suggests that priority focus should be given to the highest-need communities.

The 20,203 young children who received services from DCFS in 2006 were spread across all of the DCFS regional offices, and many others were served by special DCFS program units (Figure 6). Regional offices with the highest caseloads of young children (1,000 or more) included Belvedere, Compton, Glendora, Metro North, North Hollywood, Santa Fe Springs, Santa Clarita, and Wateridge.

Regional offices are also organized into groups serving the eight Service Planning Areas, and the highest concentrations of

young children were in SPAs 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8. Young children accounted for between 11% and 13% of all cases in SPAs 2, 3, 7, and 8. The largest concentration by far, however, was in SPA 6, where young children accounted for one in five (19.1%) of all children served. In terms of young children served by DCFS special program units outside the regional offices, the Adoptions program served the most significant number (n= 1,866).

Figure 6

Young Children (Ages 0-5) in the DCFS Caseload by Service Planning Area - 2006			
SPA 1			
Lancaster	703		
Palmdale	850		
SPA 2			
North Hollywood	1,280		
Santa Clarita	1,021		
SPA 3			
El Monte	531		
Glendora	1,314		
Pasadena	367		
Pomona	605		
SPA 4			
Metro North	1,429		
SPA 5			
West LA	304		
SPA 6			
Century	510		
Compton	1,277		
Hawthorne	574		
Wateridge	1,503		
SPA 7			
Belvedere	1,397		
Santa Fe Springs	1,083		
SPA 8			
Lakewood	1,624		
Torrance	904		
Non-SPA Specific			
Adoption	1,866	MART	43
CPH/ERCP	20	Covina - SP	639
Family First Project	51	Wilshire - SP	136
Latino Family	172		

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2006 Annual Caseload

5. **Placement patterns for young children in the DCFS system suggest that the highest-priority groups for early childhood education and family support services are relative caregivers and families who keep their children at home while receiving family maintenance services. Enhancing linkages between community-based foster family agencies (FFAs) and early childhood education providers should also be a key priority.**

Cohort data from both 2004–05 and 2005–06 (Figure 7 and Figure 8) were analyzed to examine changing patterns in maintaining children under DCFS care at home with their families, as well as movement into and between out-of-home foster care settings. In 2004–05, almost 42% (41.9%) of young children entering the DCFS system remained at home with their families while receiving voluntary or court-mandated in-home services. In 2005–06, the percentage was very similar, with 41% remaining at home. The number of children remaining at home differed significantly across SPAs. For example, in 2004–05, SPA 6 had the largest number of children at home with parents (n=633) and SPA 5 had the smallest number (n=47).

These data dramatically illustrate the significant changes in DCFS practice that are going on throughout the county as more families are engaged in developing individualized service plans at their “point of engagement” with the system. The cumulative impact of a number of new and enhanced child welfare practice strategies—including team decision-making, point of engagement, and structured decision-making—means that in addition to counseling and therapeutic services, DCFS and its partners need to focus more attention on the early childhood education and family support needs of families receiving family maintenance services.

Almost 60% of young children in these two cohorts were removed from their homes and placed in out-of-home care, at least on a temporary basis. The DCFS data shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8 compare geographic

Figure 7

Children Age 0 - 5 Entering DCFS Caseload by Removal Status and SPA				
Service Planning Area	2004-05 Cohort		2005-06 Cohort	
	Receiving Services at Home	Placed In Foster Care	Receiving Services at Home	Placed In Foster Care
SPA 1	398	469	309	468
SPA 2	423	488	361	473
SPA 3	463	831	480	700
SPA 4	377	143	334	170
SPA 5	47	47	45	42
SPA 6	633	864	540	1,001
SPA 7	519	778	425	876
SPA 8	383	645	386	670
N/A	419	812	723	784
Total	3,662	5,077	3,603	5,184

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2004–05 and 2005–06 Entry Cohort Data Caseload

Figure 8

Children Age 0 - 5 Entering DCFS Caseload by Removal Status and SPA				
Service Planning Area	2004-05 Cohort		2005-06 Cohort	
	Receiving Services at Home	Placed In Foster Care	Receiving Services at Home	Placed In Foster Care
SPA 1	46%	54%	40%	60%
SPA 2	46%	54%	43%	57%
SPA 3	36%	64%	41%	59%
SPA 4	73%	28%	66%	34%
SPA 5	50%	50%	52%	48%
SPA 6	42%	58%	35%	65%
SPA 7	40%	60%	33%	67%
SPA 8	37%	63%	37%	63%
N/A	34%	66%	48%	52%
Total	42%	58%	41%	59%

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2004–05 and 2005–06 Entry Cohort Data Caseload

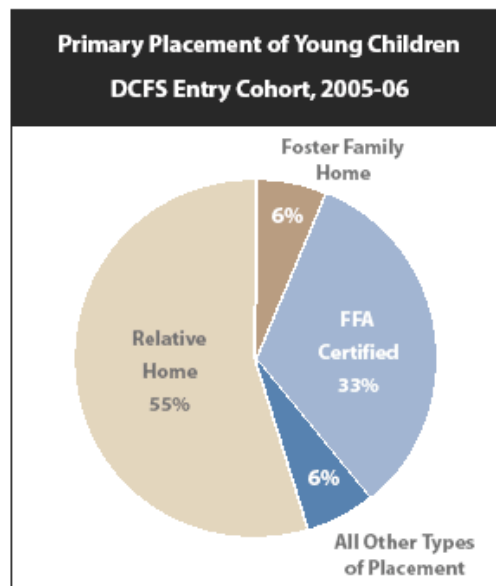
locations based on the ZIP Codes of family homes and the ZIP Codes of out-of-home placement settings. Again, different SPAs had different patterns. For example, in 2005–06, 66% of young children in SPA 4 remained at home with their families, compared with 33% of children in SPA 7.

Foster care provided by relatives was by far the most important kind of alternative care for young children who were removed from home as a result of an investigation of child maltreatment. Figure 9 shows the types of primary placements (or types of care that accounted for at least half the time in care) experienced by young children. In 2004–05, more than half of the children (51.7%) spent most of their time with relatives. In 2005–06, as shown, 55.4% spent most of their time with relatives. FFAs were the second most common type of care, accounting for the primary placement of about one-third of the children in both cohorts.

Figure 10 adds to the analysis by looking at “placement spells” and re-entries into foster care. A placement spell refers to what happens when a child is removed from the home until the time he or she is returned home again, or the case is closed by finding another permanent home for the child. When the child is removed from home, DCFS must find an immediate out-of-home placement, but the child may be moved several times before a suitable long-term alternative setting is found. A “spell in foster care” may thus refer to one or more different placement settings experienced during an episode of foster care.

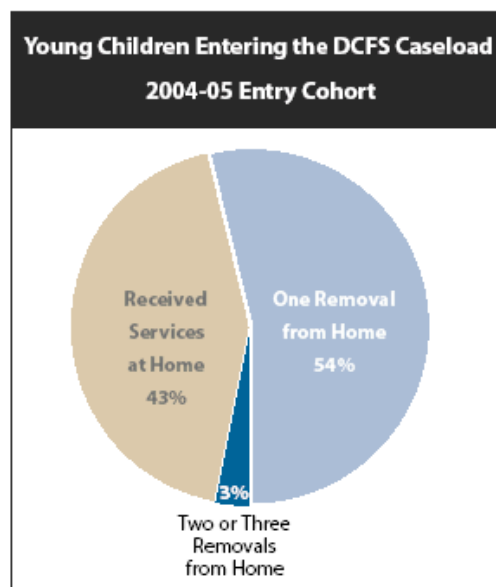
Of all young children who entered DCFS in 2004–05, 43.2% remained in family maintenance for their entire time in the child welfare system. Almost 60% of the children who entered care that year were removed from home and had at least one spell in foster care. Almost all of these children (94.7%) experienced just one spell of foster care between the time they entered the system in 2004–05 and their case closing, but 233 children experienced two spells and 19 children experienced three spells in foster care. The patterns were similar for those who entered DCFS

Figure 9



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services 2005–06 Entry Cohort Data Caseload

Figure 10



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services 2004–05 Entry Cohort Data Caseload

in 2005–06.

6. Since the current capacity of the county's child care system is already strained in many communities, it will be difficult to find appropriate care for many children.

Data on child care availability from Community Care Licensing illustrate why the search for appropriate child care can be so frustrating. To begin with, the number of child care spaces available in different regions of the county is not necessarily aligned with the number of young children who live in the area, nor with the demand for care that is affordable, accessible, and available during the hours that parents work or attend school. The countywide scarcity of licensed child care spaces for infants is also clear from Figure 11, with only 8,942 spaces available for infants in licensed child care centers countywide.

Figure 11

Child Care Capacity by Service Planning Area					
Service Planning Area	Child Care Capacity				
	Family Daycare	School Aged (5-14 or no age cutoff)	Infant Care Center (ages 0-2)	Preschool Daycare Center	Grand Total
1	7,809	904	230	4,039	12,982
2	16,630	8,041	2,016	35,326	62,013
3	13,903	7,179	1,910	30,598	53,590
4	6,509	1,842	921	16,126	25,398
5	2,972	2,744	567	11,158	17,441
6	16,369	2,337	756	16,654	36,116
7	12,510	3,082	472	16,517	32,581
8	19,117	4,506	2,016	26,257	51,896
Unknown	14	0	54	147	215
Total	97,833	30,635	8,942	156,822	294,232

Source: California Department of Social Services, Child Care Community Licensing Data

7. Although very little data is available on the current utilization of child care and early childhood education services by DCFS children, data on a small sample of foster parents served by Los Angeles WIC programs suggest that foster parents may make less use of child care than do other poor families.

The data provided by PHFE-WIC include a very small sample of only 26 foster families and 45 relative caregivers, compared with 4,698 biological parents. However, the data suggest that only 27% of foster care providers report that they use child care, compared with 34% of biological parents. Overall, foster children were in child care programs (serving children ages 0–3) somewhat less, and in preschool programs (serving children age 4) somewhat more than those of other families. The numbers in this analysis are clearly too small to support any definitive statements, but they offer potentially instructive paths for further investigation.

8. Both male and female youth in the Los Angeles County probation system report that they are already the parents of young children or are expecting a child.

Based on the most recent survey of about 18,000 youth (not including those currently in probation camps), the Probation Department now has information on 453 pregnant and/or parenting youth. Of the youth who reported that they already have or will soon have children, 240 were females and 213 were males. Eighty-six of the females who responded to the survey reported that they are currently pregnant.

While no additional information is available on the current utilization of child care or other family support services, many of these 453 young children may also have urgent needs for high-quality early childhood education experiences. Linking these young children to high-quality early childhood education programs, and providing family support services for their parents, would be an excellent investment in prevention.