

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Preventing Placement Disruptions TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Lori Fuller, California Department of Social Services; Jennifer Snarr, California Department of Social Services; Diana Boyer, County Welfare Directors Association of California; Jessica Haspel, Children Now

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:02]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:31]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast everyone. So glad you could join us. I'm Tom Oates. You know, I think it's safe to say we all experience moments of anxiety and tension and maybe more during this current time in our lives. Now lots of those moments can start from something small - a disagreement or misunderstanding - but they can escalate into larger conflicts. When they happen in a foster care setting where trauma and tension may already be high and caregivers may be trying to build trusting relationships with children and youth, sometimes those conflicts go untreated. Children, youth and caregivers are alone in trying to work things out right there on the spot. And what starts as a small disagreement or misunderstanding can turn into a call the 911, or even a disruption in a placement or path to permanency. Now, in this episode, we're going to explore immediately de-escalating those situations to avoid disrupting placement or unnecessarily involving law enforcement. And that's through a 24/7, 365-day response system. A few states have these systems in place for caregivers, children and youth to access at their discretion. But we're going to focus on California's Family Urgent Response System or FURS. Now we're going to dive deeper into all the scope and, and parameters of FURS in a moment, but for a quick overview, FURS is a statewide system providing 24/7 immediate phone-based and in-person support for situations of instability.

[00:02:15]: Now again, it's a statewide system with specific in-person response teams for each county. Remember, California is a county administered child welfare system. Now it gives children, youth and caregivers a place to find support where previously they did not know where to go or who to contact during critical moments or were previously turned away because their situation didn't rise to a certain level of urgency or emergency or otherwise fit within the resources eligibility criteria. Now, it's a state and county partnership across California's 58 counties. So, joining us on this episode are Lori Fuller, she's the Permanency Policy Bureau Chief from California's Department of Social Services; Jennifer Snarr, Staff Services Manager of the state's Permanency Policy Bureau; Diana Boyer also joins us, she's the Director of Policy for Older Adults and Child Welfare Services with the County Welfare Directors Association of California; and Jessica Haspel, Associate Director of Child Welfare Policy at Children Now, a research policy development and advocacy non-profit serving the State of California. So, take a listen to how FURS came together, how the state and counties work together, and how control is really in the hands of the children, youth, and caregivers. I encourage you to check out more information on FURS. We've got links to the guiding principles and FURS information on this episode's webpage. Just go to childwelfare.gov and search 'podcast' for this episode page. We've other resources on conflict resolution and response systems there for you. Alright, we are talking about methods to de-escalate conflicts and reduce placement disruptions and California's Family Urgent Response System here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

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[00:04:16]: Lori, Jennifer, Jessica, and Diana - thanks so much for being a part of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast and we'll start really from the needs here. And so, I'm curious, what was happening within California's resource families and children and youth that are in care that FURS was designed to address?

DIANA BOYER [00:04:37]: So, I'll start with that. So, we passed in California a major reform effort in the child welfare foster care system. It was called our continuum of care reform, or CCR for short. It was the bill we passed in 2015. It largely implemented January 1 of 2017, although there were things leading up to that that were precursors to that. And the goal was largely two-fold. One was to greatly reduce our use of congregate care for foster youth. We knew that youth in the foster care system when they go to congregate care often have very poor outcomes, educationally, permanency, and otherwise. Certainly not the environment we wanted our foster youth to be in and foster children. And we wanted to move towards a more family-based system of care. And that was part two of the goal was to build capacity and family homes, build our number of resource families, and bring services into the families homes to the youth. Whereas previously we had always expected the youth, as they, for example, had higher and higher level needs, would then progress into higher level settings, sometimes ultimately feeling up and into what was a congregate care setting. And we just wanted to flip that narrative.

[00:06:05]: So, we embarked on a series of reforms. One was to completely re-license our congregate care settings. We established new requirements and licensing and support for resource families, as well. And implemented child and family teaming; implemented a number of other initiatives. That was great. We were reducing our congregate care numbers in California compared to many other states in the nation, we're fairly, fairly low. Currently - it's 2020 now - we have in the child welfare system, only a couple thousand youth out of 60,000 that are served in congregate care. So, extremely low numbers. Probation, this proportionately also very low, as well. But, what we were finding was that it wasn't completely a perfect system. We weren't bringing the services supports into the families as we had hoped. And especially when children and youth's behaviors were getting to a point where it may be overwhelming to a caregiver, or the caregiver may be experiencing their own frustrations, there were not readily available services that could be deployed immediately to the home or to wherever that child and youth and caregiver were at at that time, to help problem-solve, to help de-escalate, and most importantly, help preserve that family unit. And so, that's why we embarked on legislation to establish the family urgent response system as a 24/7 response system, state level risk system, as well as a county mobile response system to serve families and youth in their homes.

JESSICA HASPEL [00:07:46]: And to add to what Diana has shared, we were really seeing that there were these critical moments that were arising where caregivers and youth were having some sort of conflict or miscommunication or frustration and during those moments, they were facing barriers to accessing sort of those immediate trauma informed supports. And as a result of that, we were seeing detrimental results. We were seeing police called sometimes in situations leading to the criminalization of youth that had experienced trauma. We were seeing more psychiatric hospitalizations, re-entries into foster care for youth that had experienced permanency changes in living situations. All of these things because we know our young people who've spent time in foster care or have had the trauma of abuse and neglect in removal. And yet we didn't have that, that sort of 24/7 support available to them when these issues were arising, some of which may have seemed like minor issues, but can quickly intensify and escalate without that support. And what we really heard was from caregivers, they needed that central resource to call because sometimes even when resources existed, they didn't know how to navigate them in the moment. And they felt overwhelmed and there was not like a real sense of here's where I call for support right now. I mean, we certainly knew that youth needed that, as well.

LORI FULLER [00:09:18]: And from the department perspective, we were still juggling a number of different responsibilities. Implement CCR. We were needing to recruit additional resource families. Make sure that all of the programs and policies to make CCR clear to our county partners were in place. And so it's quite a heavy lift. So, as we talk to counties about the closure of the group homes and moving children into the short-term therapeutic residential programs, we needed to have some kind of service in place for as they stepped out of those group homes and into family-based care, as Diana and Jessica were mentioning, the bringing the services into the family was still a bit of a gap. And so, FURS fit that gap by being able to create the, you know, moment in time service for some of these higher level youth with some complex needs that we're now in a different type of placement setting.

TOM OATES [00:10:27]: One of the things I'm gathering from hearing about not only all the ways you are trying to really support the caregivers, the families, and also the youth, as well, but there's also a workforce element involved in this on the other side with all your staff within DSS. So, what was happening within DSS and your caseworkers and county agencies across California that you were hoping that FURS would also design to address? Because really, it's twofold here - you've got your families you are serving, your clients. But there's also just a matter of trying to manage this and really prevent disruption. So, I'm curious to what you were hoping if FURS would be able to address something from really the workforce side?

DIANA BOYER [00:11:12]: Well, I'll kick it off on the county child welfare workforce side. We were hoping to provide support to families and youth. And in doing so, that has a secondary benefit of supporting the caseworkers' important job of ensuring that youth get the services and the access to services they need to work on reunification, to work towards permanency efforts for that youth. When we have additional services for our resource families then we're able, as Lori mentioned, to better recruit and retain our important resource families to provide loving homes for our foster youth and foster children. And this is all about at the heart of it is Strengthening Families. And when we strengthen families then we together can achieve positive outcomes down the road. We recognize that social workers have so much on their plates and they can't do it all. And we ask so much of them already. It's so critically important to provide lots of services from multiple agencies.

[00:12:15]: The other thing that FURS does is it brings multiple entities together. We're working very closely at the local level now with our behavioral health partners. The FURS system encourages peer support so those parents with lived experiences, those foster youth with lived experiences - we can even, we've also encouraged counties to utilize public health nurses when they're coming and doing that in-home response system. So, there's a number of different strategies that counties have employed and will continue to employ. And they become part of this overall team that supports the youth and feeds into what work the child and family team are doing and what work the social worker is doing. And probation officers, as well, for the foster youth and family.

TOM OATES [00:13:02]: So, let me pull back here for a second here as we've been diving deep in there and I appreciate you, Diana, pulling apart kind of, you know, how FURS is designed to really help the clients and the workforce. But let's go back and talk about a wider overview of FURS itself, the service, especially a sense of because you've kinda run the gamut on children and youth in care and families and caregivers. So, give me an overview and give listeners, if you can, overview of FURS itself and who's eligible, who qualifies for the services.

LORI FULLER [00:13:37]: So I'll start that one off. So, you know, it's been mentioned already, but I'll just reiterate that this is a statewide coordinated regional and county level system that's really intended to

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provide swift, collaborative state level responses, as well as county level in-home support to the children and families that have been touched by the child welfare system. In terms of who qualifies for FURS service and who is eligible - it's current and former foster youth and caregivers. More specifically, our caregivers in the legislation are defined very broadly. And it is really anyone who is, has the responsibility for the care of a child who is either still in foster care or who has exited foster care. Our youth are defined a little bit more specifically. And to qualify, a youth needs to have been adjudicated as a dependent of the juvenile court, either in the past and exited, either through family reunification or legal guardianship or an adoption or currently adjudicated and still in placement in foster care.

TOM OATES [00:15:01]: So, of course, for those who are listening, you know, California is a county administered child welfare system. And of course, Diana, you've got this connection with all of those counties. I'm curious of how the operation happens, really between the state and the counties. You have to go through state legislation, but it's operated at a county level. So, how was that streamlined across an entire state with the diversity that goes throughout California?

DIANA BOYER [00:15:31]: It takes a lot of work, a lot of coordination. We have had great leadership with our state partners. I can't say enough and give enough kudos to Lori and her team. We have two departments, major departments implementing this legislation - both the Department of Social Services as well as our Department of Health Care Services, which administers the Medicaid benefit or Medi-Cal for us in California. And that way we're able to leverage EPSDT, the Medicaid benefit for specialty mental health services for some of the youth that may qualify. Now this is, this is a program that you don't have to meet requirements - and we may get into that a little bit later - for specialty mental health services, it's intended to be a much broader service for that. But, we started with a state hotline. So, an individual who wants to reach out to us, the caregiver, the current or former foster youth - I'll just add that it goes up to age 21. So, we do stop at age 21 - they call that 1-800 number and it's staffed by an organization that was secured through a statewide contract through DSS. And they answer the call. And the call is intended to be very, very as brief or as long as the caller wants. They basically drive it from the start of the call, the caregiver or the youth or other important individual to that foster youth.

[00:17:02]: And they can resolve their concerns at the state hotline or we can patch them through a three-way call. So, it's a warm hand off - and that was also really important to us - to the County Mobile Response Team, who would then collect some additional information and make that in-person response as needed. So, at the state level, they're looking really at are they meeting the basic qualifications? Were they ever in foster care, for example? And then they're going down to the local level. And we have great communication with all 58 counties. Yes, there is, there can be some unique plans. All 58 counties had to submit plans for how they were going to comply with the law. And the state oversaw those plans and we worked very closely together to reach back out to counties if we felt like there was something that was missing as far as information or it wasn't completely consistent with the law to make sure those plans were, were solid. And the state leads monthly calls with all the counties and all the stakeholders to make sure that we're communicating very consistently and on a frequent basis to support all counties in their implementation efforts. And between, between all of us really and FURS was a multi-organization led advocacy effort. We had numerous organizations that promoted passing the bill and continue to work to this day to support its implementation. We had caregivers, we had local service providers, we had mental health, child welfare. A great number of cross sectors saw the need and supported the bill and continue to this day to support supplementation.

JENNIFER SNARR [00:18:49]: I'll just add to that briefly. In addition to the plans that the counties submitted, several of the counties have chosen to contract with some of their local agencies to have

assistance with doing the or completing the in-person response portion of it. And so, we've, when my team reviewed all of those county plans that were submitted, our job was just to make sure that they were meeting their requirements of the legislation. But also, we got to see a really broad variety of tactics or strategies that counties came up with to address the needs of their community. So, a lot of our more rural counties that are smaller and are not anticipating a ton of calls went with utilizing existing staff and considering an on-call sort of schedule. Or some of our larger counties have hired entire teams to respond to their first call. So, it really varies. And that was one of the benefits of allowing that flexibility for each of the counties to create the plan that works best for them. And then I also wanted to add that we had the benefit of a lot of stakeholder engagement, as Diana mentioned, we had a ton of partners on this, and we have been holding workgroups pretty much since the early kick off time. So, for well over a year now, we've had workgroups where we're engaging with county representatives and agency stakeholders, as well as some of our, some of the partners that were involved in the legislation and writing the bill. So, it's been a really wonderful partnership all the way across the board to help get FURS implemented in a timely manner.

TOM OATES [00:20:54]: You know, Jennifer, you used a lot and, Diana, you did, as well, talking about the diversity of partners and, you know, the, the different plans, and obviously, because there's so many different situations. So, to have that kind of wider group makes sense because you're not really sure what the requests are going to be, but they could be anything. So, I'm going to switch hats for a little bit and think about, what about those families and children and youth who are, come to a situation where maybe they use FURS. So, what's the kind of scope on what FURS covers and what it doesn't. Because if I am a family and I pick up the phone, where does this fit? Like, what falls under the FURS umbrella? I'm curious, because the scope of situations appear so wide, what are you telling families, children and youth on, on using FURS or when to use FURS?

JESSICA HASPEL [00:21:51]: I'm happy to kick us off on this one. I mean, I think this goes back to some of what we've already mentioned earlier, but they, we're really trying to emphasize how user-driven FURS is, which is that we want youth and caregivers to be the ones that are defining what they need in terms of their immediate support and when they need it. Which is very different than many existing resources where it's sort of a professional saying you have to reach this level to get the support or you get this support, you get the phone support, but you don't get the in-person support because your situations not an emergency. So, we really, one of our key pieces of messaging has really been that this is user-driven, caller driven. The youth and caregivers are defining what they need and when they need it. And trying to really emphasize that in, you know, that that is one of the key pieces of intent behind FURS is that the youth and caregivers be in the driver's seat. And I'll pass it over to Diana, I think we're going to add a little bit to that.

DIANA BOYER [00:22:57]: Yes, exactly. So, it was important to us to not pathologize kids any further. And in so many situations, including in California, a youth has to need a mental health diagnosis in order to, and go through this very comprehensive assessment and then maybe services will be provided. And we completely flipped that narrative in California. We said, if you to you youth or caregiver feel like this is something where you need help and you want somebody else to come and support you, then give us a call and we'll be there. We aren't letting any sort of a federal or state funding stream derive eligibility or entry into the services under FURS. We provide the service and then we figure it out later. Maybe it'll come under Medicaid and qualify as specialty mental health. Maybe it won't, that's okay. The important thing is we're providing the service to the youth and caregiver at the time they need it and in the intensity of that need. And we're communicating that fairly broadly with, with families and other, other individuals. And I think Lori can add to that a bit, piece of it.

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LORI FULLER [00:24:14]: Yes, so, when we were designing the program and figuring out how to implement, we knew that it would be important to work with our partners to develop some strategies for outreach and communication. So, we actually had a sub workgroup to the larger workgroup that was specifically tasked with sort of coming up with some of those strategies. And so, what happened is we designed them fliers, both those that were directed at the youth as well as the caregivers. We also have some wallet cards, magnets, stickers, those kinds of things. But all of them have some of the same key messages that we wanted to ensure are out there as we try and engage youth and caregivers to encourage them to call in. The, pretty much the most important factor as we want, first, to be viewed as utilizing its service is a sign of strength. So, particularly for our caregivers who often struggle with reaching out for help and then sometimes that leads to the problem getting bigger and more likely to lead to a placement disruption, we want caregivers to know that they can reach out. It's not going to lead to any repercussions on their placements or how they're viewed as a caregiver by the county. And so, that's one of the big key messages, is it's a sign of strength to reach out for help.

[00:25:51]: We also want folks to know that you're not alone. This relationship of parenting and being a youth in foster care is challenging. And oftentimes it does feel like you're kind of on an island and a little bit lonely in that. And so, by having a service where they can call and just simply talk to someone, they are supported in knowing that they're not alone, that a lot of folks struggle with some of these same kinds of things. Also want to ensure that folks know that FURS is a safe and judgment free type of service. They're not going to, like I said, have any negative repercussions at the county level by utilizing FURS. We particularly want our youth to know that by reaching out and asking for some assistance, they'll, they'll get the support they need without their placement being in jeopardy, without, you know, perhaps if they're on probation, there's not going to be a direct line to their PO where they're violated, that sort of thing. So, those are some of the things that we really strategized when we developed all the materials, as well as the word of mouth. We've given several presentations at different forums across the state and we're just, you know, consolidating those messages throughout all the communication that we have.

TOM OATES [00:27:25]: And, let me follow up a little bit on that. There's an independence aspect to FURS to where, one, you're really putting the control in the hands of the youth or the family. And the fact that someone is calling a state hotline versus going through their own county. So, can you explain to me why youth or families really aren't asking to connect with their caseworker to get FURS service, but it's kind of like there's a separate pathway for them. Can you explain why that's the case?

JESSICA HASPEL [00:28:03]: I think a key piece -

LORI FULLER [00:28:04]: Oh, go ahead, Jessica, sorry.

JESSICA HASPEL [00:28:06]: Jump in on this one. I mean, it's not that we think youth shouldn't or caregivers shouldn't reach out to their caregivers when they, whenever they want to, the idea is what we heard is there are oftentimes where they may not be able to reach a caregiver - I mean, sorry, a case worker. For example, you know, we know our caseworkers are very busy. They may be at court, they may be with another family. It may be, you know, outside normal business hours and they just can't reach someone when what they need is immediate support, not to wait for Monday morning or the next day or for the caseworker to be out of court. So, that's one reason why we really wanted to make sure that this was a resource that was available that youth and caregivers could call directly when they felt they needed it.

[00:28:55]: We also recognize there are some times when the caregiver might not be comfortable calling the caseworker - as much as we want them to be comfortable doing, there are those situations where they're not, maybe there's been a lot of turnover and they don't, they haven't really established a strong relationship yet. Or, you know, or there's something going on in that relationship. Or they, they just want that what they perceived to be a completely neutral person. Additionally, there are some situations where the, there may be a need for some expertise that the caseworker does not have. It may be a mental health situation where they would benefit from speaking with someone that has that, that mental health background. So, it's for a lot of reasons why we wanted to make sure that we weren't creating some sort of like exhaustion requirement where they had to go through someone else to get the support.

LORI FULLER [00:29:50]: And I'll just add that again, like our social workers don't have this type of expertise. And we ask so much of them already. It's intended to be a support to them, secondary, but almost, almost as much as perhaps to the family and the caregiver themselves, too. When we were advocating for this with the legislature, we went out of our way to try to get as much foster youth and put it into how to establish the system, too, the FURS response system. And there was a strong desire for that safe, sort of third party to start with, at least. So, that statewide hotline does help with that and a number of situations can be resolved, in fact, by just that conversation that happens between that state person, that statewide hotline worker. Which also brings some consistency in how calls are taken, another benefit of that. And, sort of another benefit of the statewide hotline before we refer to a mobile response is that you do have youth that move around, unfortunately, when we have 58 counties and so when we place across county lines, everybody felt it was really important to have one statewide hotline number to call. And then that statewide hotline number, those staff know how to get a hold of the counties, we update that with that information. So we've, we've tried to listen as much as we could to those that were going to benefit on this and how we set up our, our system.

TOM OATES [00:31:21]: I'm curious to the relationships, again between the state and counties because of that diverse nature, you guys pointed to the individual counties and their case plans. And so, it is at the county level where the response happens depending on what the need or really the ask from the children or families. So, what were the requirements that you set forth for each of these counties - knowing that various counties have various needs and staffing - what were the requirements for each county for their response team?

JENNIFER SNARR [00:31:59]: I'll go ahead and kick us off for that one. So, we require that each of the counties establish a 24/7 in person mobile response team that they could send out whenever there was a request for an in-person response. And, those team members are expected to be particularly trained in crisis de-escalation, trauma-informed care, and how to provide some stabilization and support for an immediate situation. In addition to that, we require that that contact is a face-to-face contact. So, many counties were hoping that they might be able to just give them a call and provide some over the phone support because it is a hardship on many of the counties to have a team available 24/7. But, that was such a key part of making this program successful that we really drove home the requirement to have that in-person response available all of the time. And then while they're out there providing that in-person response, we ask that that team provide some caregiver intervention, some youth interventions. Many of our kind of suggested techniques are to have a multiple person team, so at least two people on a team so one can sit with the youth and one can sit with the caregiver, then everyone can come back together again. And oftentimes our kind of last piece of the in-person mobile response is to create a safety plan or something to help get that family through that immediate crisis and stable enough until the ongoing services can be connected. And the case caring worker or follow-up staff can then come in

and kind of start those connections. Often, we encourage the counties to follow-up shortly after mobile response with a child and family team meeting or CFT because that is a perfect opportunity for all of the folks that have a stake in that youth's life to come together and create a plan to address any of the immediate needs. So, I think that kind of covers the majority of what we were looking for in those teams.

TOM OATES [00:34:32]: You'd mentioned the personal touch, right? And it's not just going to be a phone call. People are going to show up, they're going to, they're going to have that dialogue. But it's not just at that county response level. And you guys had hinted to it earlier. But I'd like you to kind of expand on this, that the idea - or not even the idea - but the importance of what you call a warm hand-off. And so when that initial call is made to the state, that it's not just simply hey, let me transfer you. So, I want you to dive into a little bit more about what that one handoff really looks like and why that was so important.

JESSICA HASPEL [00:35:13]: I'm, I'm happy to jump into this one. You know, when a caller reaches the statewide hotline number, I mean, they do get some initial de-escalation support or an ear to listen and, and help in navigating whatever situation they're in. But certainly in keeping with talking about this as a user-driven program, when the youth or caregiver says that they do want more support, they feel that they could use someone to come out and meet with them in-person, a warm handoff happens through a three-way call where the statewide hotline counselor that's been speaking to the youth or caregiver stays on the line and connects with the county single point of contact for the family urgent response system. So, I'm not sure if we highlighted this, but each county in developing their family urgent response system program had to identify a single contact so that we're getting directly to the contact for the team that's going to go out. And so, in that three-way call, the hotline counselor, the youth and caregiver, and then that single point of contact from the county are all on the line together. And that allows the hotline counselor to share some of what was already talked about during the statewide call, about what's happening, what's the reason that support is needed. And that allows for the caregiver or youth to hear that, as well, add anything they want. And it really avoids the youth or caregiver having to retell their story, which is what we really wanted to make sure happens. We want to get a team out there as quickly as possible and we don't want youth or caregivers to have to repeat themselves. We don't want to delay getting them the support and we want them to feel supported throughout the entire process.

[00:37:17]: So, the hotline counselor stays on the phone until the county contact has all the information they need and is able to identify the team to go out. And that really makes sure that no balls get dropped, that the team gets out there as quickly as possible. And most importantly, again, that that youth and caregiver feel supported. I think we all know from having called and needed customer support for something that it's infuriating if you tell your story or what your problem is and then the person you're speaking to says, okay, let me transfer you somewhere else and then you have to start over. And that's the last thing that we want to see happen to our youth and caregivers when they are saying I'm struggling and I need help. So, that's really what the impetus around this is what the handoff really needs to look like.

TOM OATES [00:38:12]: A part of that added benefit is also there's a reduction of any misinterpretation. Or if somebody tells somebody else, did they interpret it the right way then you've got somebody there to clarify. And it may not be retelling your story, but to make sure that everybody gets it right. Because the last thing you may want is someone to show up with a different mindset of what they're walking into. And then you find yourself repeating your story or, or again, being misinterpreted. So, it's a need, it

may seem very, very simple. And for folks listening in, who are thinking about executing something like this, these are the small things where you talk about a statewide system run individually by counties, but still honing on the relationships that can be developed and true interpersonal communication.

[00:39:06]: So, this came from, I guess, a model that was implemented earlier in New Jersey and you guys, or the state of California has taken this and tried to build FURS. But part of this is when we originally started talking at the beginning of the episode here, was the legislation that had to go into creating this. So, I'm curious, the model must have helped, but I'm curious to the other selling points that you were able to use to get the funding past for FURS?

LORI FULLER [00:39:39]: Yes. And I'd have to start by thanking Casey Family Programs because they brought New Jersey out here. And also, we had a team that went to New Jersey to learn about how they've established their mobile responses. And they're not the only state that has something like this - there's a handful, but not many. And we learned what a benefit it was to them. They were a few years ahead of us in 2002. And for them in New Jersey, it was a way to bring the kids that were in congregate care, specifically out-of-state, back home into New Jersey. They also wanted to do a whole host of reforms to reduce their congregate care numbers and more specifically bringing services into the home. That was certainly one of our selling points was to bring the services that families needed and youth needed to fulfill the promise of continuum of care reform in California. This was a missing piece and that was something that we reminded the legislature that we're not going to have complete success in TCR, if we don't fill these gaps and this was an important gap that needed to be filled.

[00:40:53]: We also really wanted to avoid having a caregiver contact law enforcement for support. That to us was just not acceptable, not something we wanted to force counties or I'm sorry, to force caregivers to feel like they had to resort to calling law enforcement. We love our law enforcement professionals. They absolutely have a place in our continuum of work and community-based services, but it's not where we want them to be in our homes and in our congregate care settings. We also wanted to support youth from escalating to a point where because their level of frustration, their level of trauma was so deep and for any of us, but certainly for foster youth, not feeling heard, not feeling understood. For kids, especially in younger kids, that frustration that builds over time can quickly become something that escalates. And our fear was, it gets so deep that it ends up resulting in, for example, a hospitalization, a psychiatric emergency, et cetera. And that was another selling point is we are trying to avoid that ambulance ride for the child and if you keep not responding to the cries for help and support in the home, that's eventually what could potentially happen. And so, getting in there as early as possible.

[00:42:24]: I think finally, a selling point is for permanency support. We are expected to work towards a permanency solution, whether it's reunification, which by and large is where most of our work is in is in reunification and we're able to reunify, but also in adoption and guardianship. It was important to not say, okay, we're done and we're walking away. But what's that continued support we can provide and we know that after our case is closed that there are things that are still happening in the home dynamics as a child is growing and there's child development and they're hitting their adolescent years, it can be very challenging for caregivers. And we're able to provide that support as that youth is, is growing up with that family to just strengthen the family.

TOM OATES [00:43:13]: So, your states and counties have all come up to speed. And so, as we record this, and you start thinking about those selling points that you were able to put in front of the state that you've gotten the legislation, finally gotten the counties all up to speed after their plans had been

submitted and they are able to execute. We're talking as we're recording this, about four months or so since all the counties have come up to full speed. So, I'm curious to what you've seen so far regarding FURS activity and feedback from those staff across the counties working within the programs and trying to engage children, youth, and families to be aware of FURS and leverage it. What have you seen so far in the early stages?

JENNIFER SNARR [00:44:05]: I'll take that one, just kick us off at least. So we have a steady increase in calls and that's been growing with every passing month. So, that's encouraging for all of us because that means that the word is getting out there. I would say that we started out in our very, very first month with about 18 mobile responses. That was, we were excited because that was brand new and that was back in our, before our full statewide launch in July, so back in March. But we've seen that double when we hit our full launch in July. And now we've almost doubled again to an even higher number in September and in this last month of October, I don't have the numbers yet, but I would venture a guess that we've increased our mobile responses even further. So, this is just exciting growth. And another interesting fact related to this very high-level data is that we're also starting to see, or we've consistently seen about one in five of those calls resulting in a mobile response. So, this is helpful for the counties to know that a large number of these callers are just needing some phone support and somebody to talk to, you know, just need an ear. I think that's really been missing for a lot of our families and youth. They just need someone to hear them out and be, feel heard.

[00:45:47]: And that's enough to get them connected to either just get them that immediate support or get them connected to some very high-level resources. But when they want that mobile response, it is available and we're seeing that those numbers are steadily growing along with the overall calls that we're getting. And then just in the last month we've started getting reports that our youth callers are starting to increase, as well. In the beginning we were really hitting the mark in getting the word out to some of our caregivers. And I think we can largely thank our resource family programs for that. We've had a lot of feedback from the counties that by reaching out to their resource families and getting the word out to them that we were seeing a lot of caregivers calling, but we were still struggling to get the word out to youth. And that started to improve over time, as well. And so, we're just going to continue those outreach efforts and keep spreading the word and hope to see it continue to grow over time.

LORI FULLER [00:46:51]: Now, I'll just sort of add to that. What we've seen is actually quite promising because the intent of FURS as all of us have mentioned was to reduce the number of calls to law enforcement, to mental health crisis lines that result in psychiatric hospitalization, and to our placement disruption, disrupting. And we have seen some emerging themes so far with our FURS services that's really addressed those unmet needs. And so, what we are seeing is a lot of youth and caregivers are calling because a youth is engaging in some early types of self-harm behavior, they're expressing some level of suicidality. And we are very aware of the national mental health crisis for youth and families that's occurring right now. And so, it's good to hear that this service is starting to be responsive to some of those needs. And, as Jennifer said, many of the callers are, things get resolved and they're ready to move on after talking to the statewide hotline counselor. But, as well, about 20% of those are receiving an in-person response, which has really been helpful for those situations where someone needs to talk with the youth and someone needs to talk with the caregiver. And we've seen a number of positive outcomes from our caregivers and also word from the social workers about placement disruptions that have been avoided because there was someone to get there right in the moment and just help everyone calm down using the de-escalation techniques that these folks are trained to perform.

[00:48:51]: Other things that are surfacing is a lot of calls - particularly from caregivers - expressing that the youth is, tantruming, they're having some aggressive kind of behavior that happens with all children from time to time. And so, many of the calls that we're getting are about that. And just having the caregivers hear some suggestions on behavioral interventions that they can employ in the moment and also sometimes the youth are getting on the phone. We had one situation where a youth was having a tantrum about a dinnertime food issue, which is common with our youth in foster care. And the eight-year-old youth got on the phone with the hotline counselor and they were able to give her some breathing techniques, have her talk about her feelings and really de-escalated a situation that sprung up from just a dinner time situation. And within about 20 minutes, the youth was calmed down, she sat back down at the table, they continued their dinner and everything was back on track. So, something very simple like that we're seeing repeated throughout many of our calls. And it's preventing those larger scale behaviors and problems that require a higher level of intervention. So, really glad to see that.

[00:50:21]: One other theme that has emerged is youth who were frustrated and they're contemplating running away, leaving their placement. And they are calling FURS and getting the support that they need, someone to just sort of help strategize and plan for them. What can they do? Where can they get some of their needs met so that they don't need to leave their placements. Also, caregivers who are calling when a youth is expressing a desire to leave or run away, are getting some strategies about how to get support. What we're noticing is a lot of folks need respite. And so that is occurring in many counties. But on the other hand, that is one of our challenges is that we need more respite care providers. So, this early months of FURS have helped us identify some of the other gaps that we can work to fill in California. So that's really, you know, we're starting to be folks calling for a wide number of things. And as Jennifer reported, just so happy to see that the youth are starting to call in higher numbers because that's, that's really what it's all about.

DIANA BOYER [00:51:38]: One thing I'll add to that.

JENNIFER SNARR [00:51:39]: Oh, sorry. Go ahead, Dianne.

DIANA BOYER [00:51:42]: I'll just say that the great thing about the calls - and to your question, Tom about what themes are emerging - it is giving us a very unique way of gaining insight into what the needs are for our caregivers and our youth and where we have still some gaps to fill. So, I think one example that Lori mentioned was that respite care. Practically from day one, that became fairly obvious to us that we may need to think about how do we create some opportunities there. Because we don't have a statewide respite program, we rely on foster parents to kinda work it out between themselves and sometimes there's support from the social workers to do that. It's a little challenging and we see it play out for our juvenile justice youth. So, those are served by our probation departments. And juvenile hall isn't really a great place for respite. We don't want to go there. So, we're working it out in the first few months. So, we're starting to get a lot of insight into those needs and we hope it will help us inform future support efforts for caregivers and youth.

JENNIFER SNARR [00:52:47]: And I was just going to add that another gap I think we've caught onto from some of these early summary reports and the things that we've seen from our mobile responses is that twofold - it's great because we are starting to see a lot of the former foster youth and their adoptive parents or adoptive families calling, which is a huge benefit because it can help reduce re-entry into the system. But we're also recognizing that maybe in some of our areas, the post-adoption services are not as robust as we would like them to be. So, there are a lot of our post-adoption families that are

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reaching out to FURS and we're struggling to get those, you know, the counties are struggling to get those immediate, ongoing services in place. That's just not as readily available as the services for current foster youth. And so, again, it's really highlighting an area of need where we're starting to do some work with our counties to help build those programs up more. So, that has been a ton of feedback that we've gotten from the counties, too. They are using it as a tool to recognize their own local needs and gaps, as well as us at the state level recognizing some of the statewide gaps. So, that's been an eye opener for many of us.

TOM OATES [00:54:17]: For those states or those jurisdictions that are listening to this and those caseworkers, the stories that you guys have just shared over the past few minutes - and really we're only talking about the first few months - should be a wonderful case study, or just the reason to learn about this a little bit more. So, on these episodes' webpage will make sure that you guys can find links to further information on FURS from the California Department of Social Services. And just recognizing the idea of small pieces of prevention and just working the small issues can escalate into larger ones, that being able to listen or to provide the right kind of support at the right time makes such a difference. Lori Fuller, Jennifer Snarr, Diana Boyer, and Jessica Haspel - thank you guys so much. First off, congratulations on the work that's done so far for FURS in California. And thank you so much for spending your time here with us on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Appreciate your time, appreciate your energy and thanks so much for the insight.

All [00:55:36]: Thank you for having us. Yes. Thank you.

TOM OATES [00:55:40]: Okay. So, head on over to childwelfare.gov and search podcasts. On this episode's webpage we'll have more information on California's FURS program, including the guiding principles and an initial summary report. We'll also have some background information on the New Jersey model that the group mentioned that was used to justify the legislation that established FURS. Hey, if you like the conversations and insights that we're sharing here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, you can subscribe to the Information Gateway podcast. You can find us at Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. We're so honored to have you spending your valuable time with us. And a reminder, if you are looking for information on laws and policies, resources to share with colleagues or families, reports or other information to help your work serving children, youth and families, please reach out to us here at Child Welfare Information Gateway, at info@childwelfare.gov. Again, my thanks to Lori Fuller, Jennifer Snarr, Diana Boyer, and Jessica Haspel for their time and insight. And my thanks to you for joining us here every month on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:57:05]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at childwelfare.gov and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.