

Countywide Services Agency

Department of  
Health and Human Services

Child Protective Services

Laura Coulthard, Deputy Director



Steven C. Szalay,  
Interim County Executive

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Ann Edwards-Buckley,  
Department Director

## County of Sacramento

June 24, 2010

Dear Community Partner,

Child Protective Services (CPS) has completed a multi-system review of four-year old Amariana Crenshaw's life in foster care prior to her tragic death in 2008. The review included an evaluation of casework, foster home oversight, communication and collaboration within CPS and among partner agencies. In sharing these findings with you, we commit to providing the leadership necessary to fully understand and address their implications for children in our care.

Overall, the review points to a troubling combination of organizational, practice and communication issues consistent with the findings included in the 2009 MGT of America and the Grand Jury reports. The review also indicates that misperceptions and inaccurate assumptions skewed case work and that the multiple systems involved with Amariana were each working in isolation. All of these factors resulted in our collective inability to support Amariana's well being.

Understanding and addressing the findings in this review are of paramount importance to CPS as we continue the corrective course begun in the aftermath of the child deaths in 2008, including the loss of Amariana. As we have shared with you, the system improvement plan that emerged from the MGT and Grand Jury report recommendations is underway, resulting in significantly improved safety assessment and response. We are integrating accountability measures into every level of our work resulting in increased and improved supervision of staff, data based evaluation and ongoing quality assurance corrections. Our placement and case management practices are being restructured to support sustained relationships with and on behalf of the children in our care. Additionally, we have reached out to and continue to involve our community partners who are so vital to ensuring the well being of children in our care.

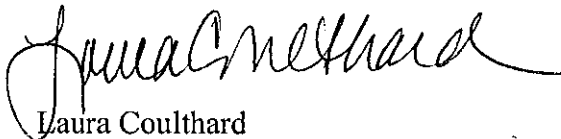
Despite these recent gains, the challenges across the system of care run deep. As we work to correct many of the larger systemic issues highlighted in this review, we also take note of a critical lesson to be gleaned from these findings – that a number of “smaller” factors can have a significant impact on a child's safety. As the Sacramento Bee noted in its 2008 series on CPS, “the tipping point for kid's safety often comes down to seemingly small things: .... an unanswered knock at the door, a miscue between agencies, a lack of follow-through, an incomplete background check....” We must cultivate a culture and system of care which regularly and consistently attend to these details.

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In Amariana's case, we found that many of the seemingly small issues had to do with a lack of information sharing and documentation within and across the agencies, programs and individuals who had a role in her care, which resulted in no one person or agency having a complete understanding of what was happening in her daily life. The absence of shared communication and coordinated response revealed in this review calls for urgent collective action among partners in the child welfare community. It also reinforces the need to create a CPS culture that encourages and is receptive to concerns expressed by parents, advocates, partner agencies, labor, the media and the community at large.

To begin this work, CPS is reaching out to the California Department of Social Services Community Care and Licensing Division, the courts, foster family agencies, public health, Sacramento Child Advocates and other community leaders to build effective collaborative systems of communication, response and oversight. Initial meetings have resulted in joint understanding and resolution of some critical issues which you will find delineated in the action items section of the attached summary of findings. I invite you to join us and our other partners as we continue this important dialogue in our next community partnership forum to be held in September. Between now and then, I welcome your individual and collective input as we move forward to support the safety and well being of the children we serve.

Sincerely,



Laura Coulthard  
Deputy Director

Attachment

cc. Ann Edwards-Buckley