



Office of Children
and Family Services

Response to:

New York State

Citizen Review Panels for
Children and Family Services

**2015
Annual
Report**

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor
Sheila J. Poole, Acting Commissioner

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is in receipt of the 2015 Annual Report and Recommendations of the New York State Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services. We appreciate and concur with the recommendations in the report.

As this document will show, OCFS has proactively addressed many of these recommendations. Upon receiving the New York State Child and Family Services Review performance data in 2014, OCFS engaged stakeholders in understanding and addressing the urgency this information represents for the children and families in New York State. Initial steps included producing and disseminating relevant data, analyzing factors impacting performance and developing strategies to improve safety and permanency outcomes. Action items related to this approach have been documented in OCFS's five-year improvement plan as part of the federal Child and Family Services Plan.

OCFS has been strategically prepared for addressing performance through the recently established Child Welfare Practice Model which creates the foundation for OCFS and its stakeholders to improve outcomes for children and families. OCFS looks forward to partnering with the panel on a coordinated, action-oriented five-year approach to address the devastating impacts of child abuse and maltreatment.

Recommendations and Response

Recommendations:

- **Take a public health approach to addressing child abuse and neglect, with an emphasis on early prevention**
- **Include a commitment to meaningful collaboration across state agencies**

Response:

Recognizing that many families experiencing child abuse and maltreatment never enter the child welfare system, there has been a concerted effort on the state and federal level to address this devastating problem through a public health lens. Using available data, the goal is to identify risk factors families may be experiencing and use this information to target prevention efforts. OCFS supports continuing this approach and has a history of using data and collaborating with other state agencies to improve health and safety outcomes for children and families.

A recent example of this public health approach is the partnership between OCFS and the Department of Health (DOH) in addressing child fatalities due to unsafe sleep. Unsafe sleep continues to be the leading cause of child fatalities reviewed by OCFS; 56 percent of the fatalities reviewed by OCFS from 2010 to 2014 were for children under the age of one and in approximately half of those, there was at least one unsafe sleep risk factor.

Preventing child abuse/maltreatment and child fatalities are joint priorities of both state agencies. OCFS has joined the DOH-led Infant Mortality Reduction Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoINN) and is co-chairing the workgroup focused on reducing infant fatalities related to unsafe sleep. Under this initiative, OCFS has partnered with DOH to distribute safe sleep materials to new parents while they are in the hospital. The participating hospitals will be providing tote bags filled with educational materials and safe sleep tools, and nurses will provide information to the parents regarding safe sleep. One month after discharge from the hospital, consenting parents will be surveyed to determine the effectiveness of the safe sleep materials.

OCFS also partners with DOH in administering the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program funds. OCFS uses these funds to support and expand the Healthy Families NY Home Visiting Program (HFNY), an evidence-based primary prevention program. HFNY reaches parents during the prenatal period and right after the birth of the baby, focusing on improving childhood outcomes. OCFS is also a member of a statewide interagency workgroup, convened by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, promoting universal and coordinated evidence-based home visiting services throughout the state.

Over the past year, OCFS has worked closely with the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and DOH around the heroin epidemic and its impact on the child welfare system. In response to this growing epidemic, OCFS created an Advisory Group of local social services district representatives from across the state. This group identified training needs and resources to help caseworkers recognize signs of abuse, understand the impacts on family functioning and learn about intervention and treatment options. OCFS, in collaboration with OASAS, provided a webcast to assist local departments of social services in responding to the opiate problem. OCFS has been coordinating with OASAS and DOH regularly regarding resources, data, and training options. Representatives from the collaborating agencies also attended a convening in Burlington, Vermont designed to engage a multi-disciplinary group of public agencies to drive cross-systems responses to address the opioid epidemic in New York and Vermont.

Additional examples of inter-agency and early prevention efforts are further highlighted throughout this report.

Recommendation:

- **Be data driven with aggressive, measurable goals**

Response:

In October 2014, New York State (NYS) received its federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) safety and permanency performance measures and immediately took aggressive steps to better understand the data. OCFS was strategically prepared to address performance, having recently completed the development of the New York State Child Welfare Practice Model. With the assistance of a national consultant and input from local districts and other stakeholders, OCFS developed the Practice Model which was finalized in March, 2015. The Practice Model serves as the roadmap for achieving improved outcomes for children and families. The model is designed to bring cohesiveness to a diverse network of partners, thereby aligning resources toward better outcomes.

One of the first steps in implementation of the Practice Model was understanding the data and the conditions contributing to the results. Because the federal syntax was not shared with states, OCFS staff re-created the CFSR measures in order to provide each county with their individualized performance. The first distribution of data included a rank order from strongest performance to weakest for each of four Permanency Indicators; these were grouped by region and number of children in care so that counties could compare their performance to similar counties. The second distribution included the same data indicators by gender, race and age. Each distribution was followed up by a conference call to assist counties in understanding the data and its implications and to brainstorm strategies for improvement.

The Permanency data was updated and distributed with the Safety data in December 2015, following the federal distribution of the syntax for the performance measures. Data packets will be distributed on a regular basis to all local social service districts to assist in supporting practice improvements.

OCFS contracted with Public Catalyst (PC), a national organization that partners with child welfare stakeholders who want to improve outcomes for children and their families. PC uses a data-driven approach to help identify barriers and create effective solutions for better outcomes; design and implement new approaches that improve outcomes, and identify bright spots in local practice which can be leveraged into system change. PC is working with the state's four largest counties. The work in these counties combined is likely to improve the state's overall performance levels. The ultimate goal would be to replicate this work throughout the state.

OCFS staff also provided training and on-site technical assistance to counties in each region of the state in an effort to teach local departments of social services to access and understand how to analyze and use data to impact practice. OCFS is pursuing additional tools and resources to further support the use of data for managing caseloads and impacting practice and outcomes.

Recommendation

➤ Invest in primary prevention and proven child welfare programs

Response:

The state reimbursement for Preventive Services and for Community Optional Preventive Services remained steady in the 2015 budget. Still, New York State's reimbursement for Preventive Services is the highest in the country. In addition to the local social service district-mandated and optional Preventive Services, OCFS funds a range of community-based prevention programs through a combination of state funds and federal grants as described below.

Healthy Families NY Home Visiting Program

A cornerstone of the OCFS prevention continuum is the Healthy Families NY Home Visiting Program (HFNY). As the Panel notes, there is extensive evidence of the effectiveness of this program on health and safety outcomes for children. OCFS currently supports 37 HFNY programs in 31 counties across the state. In collaboration with DOH, OCFS was successful in receiving federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds to expand 10 of these programs and to establish a new program in Brooklyn. Additionally, OCFS plans to issue a Request for Proposals in 2016 for start-up and expansion of HFNY programs in high need and underserved areas of the state.

HFNY is an evidence-based prevention program which offers systematic assessments for pregnant women and new parents. Trained paraprofessionals from the community served provide home visiting services weekly for at least the first six months and less frequently thereafter, based on the needs of the family, until the child enters kindergarten or Head Start. Services include parenting education, family support and linkages to community supports.

A 15-year follow-up study is currently underway. In-depth interviews with mothers and their now adolescent children are being conducted to assess outcomes such as maternal life course, child abuse and maltreatment, parenting practices, family conflict, educational experiences, youth behaviors, delinquent/criminal activity, health and access to health care. Data collection and preliminary analyses are expected to be completed by 2019. It is anticipated that positive results may help to leverage additional funding sources to continue to expand these effective programs.

Kinship/KinGap

OCFS supports Kinship and Kinship Guardianship (KinGap) as effective permanency options. OCFS directly funds 15 Kinship programs which address the multiple needs of Kinship caregivers including financial stability, respite, parenting education, family support, and legal information and support groups.

In 2015, OCFS disseminated a Kinship Request for Proposals (RFP). In addition to promoting statewide access to kinship services, this RFP seeks to establish a cohesive model for OCFS kinship programs by supporting evidence-based practices, emerging practices and promising practices in the field of Kinship Care. As an outcome of the RFP, 13 Kinship Programs are being funded across the state. In 2015, unspent Temporary Assistance for Needy Family funds was awarded to two additional Kinship programs bringing the total number of programs to 15.

In January 2015, OCFS issued an Administrative Directive entitled "Continuation of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) to a Successor Guardian" (15-OCFS-ADM-02) as part of the implementation of the federal P.L. 113-183 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. This law allows for the continuation of KinGAP payments to a successor guardian upon death or incapacitation of the KinGAP relative guardian. The policy provides information to local social services districts and Voluntary Agencies on the law and process for this continuation of KinGAP to the successor guardian.

Additionally, OCFS has established performance targets for each local social services district based on a file of the children residing with approved/certified relatives for a period of six months or more. These are children who do not have a goal of adoption or return to parent. Targets to move 40 percent of the children toward final approval of a KinGAP application would also advance statewide success in accessing guardianship incentive payments. OCFS plans to create a desk aid which will provide caseworkers with an easy to follow guide for completing the KinGAP process with relatives. OCFS regional staff will be supporting county efforts as needed to achieve permanency in KinGAP cases. OCFS is currently developing an electronic system for local social services districts to expedite the KinGAP application and agreement process.

CPS/DV Collaboratives

Recognizing the significant overlap in families where there is both child abuse and domestic violence (DV), OCFS began supporting out-stationed DV advocates in child protective services (CPS) offices in the late 1990s. Currently, 16 counties have CPS/DV collaboration projects. The goal of these programs is to improve case practice and outcomes. These programs were evaluated by the Center for Human Services Research and the findings showed that the programs increased collaboration between CPS and DV workers, improved knowledge about addressing child safety with DV clients, improved CPS workers' knowledge of DV dynamics and increased linkages to services.

CPS/Behavioral Health Consultant

In 2015, OCFS made available to local departments of social services funding for CPS/Behavioral Health consultants. Districts were able to apply for up to \$75,000 for the salary and fringe benefits of a Behavioral Health Consultant to work alongside CPS caseworkers in order to identify and support the behavioral health needs of both the adults and children in families involved in child protective services. A total of 14 districts are being funded for two years, at which time the local districts will assume responsibility for the continuation of the consultants.

Family Resource Centers

Utilizing federal funds, OCFS supports seven programs with a total of 17 Family Resource Center sites across the state. Family Resource Centers (FRCs) offer evidence-based and evidence-informed parenting training and other formal and informal supports to families. FRCs focus on families with children under five years of age and aim at improving parent resiliency, child development and parenting skills.

FRCs focus on high-risk families using a family engagement approach, while being universally available to all families. FRCs use many types of evidence-based and evidence-informed programming including the Incredible Years, Parents as Teachers, the Nurturing Parenting Program and other parent education programs and strategies.

Public Private Partnerships

Through state funds, OCFS funds collaborative prevention programs in nine counties and New York City. The projects are required to include local partnerships with private and non-profit entities working together to achieve mutually-identified objectives. Some examples of funded projects include: supporting children who have been terminated from or are at risk of being terminated from child care programs due to challenging behaviors; working with disconnected youth at risk of out-of-home placement; providing funding for at-risk families with children ages 0-3 to provide home visits by teachers and family development specialists; providing trauma-informed training to an entire county-based cross-system team; and piloting the use of evidence-based intervention with families with children ages 0-3.

Recommendation:

- **Strengthen the public and private child welfare workforce**

Response:

Training

OCFS is committed to transforming the current child welfare training system to align with the Practice Model and its core competencies. In 2015, OCFS convened a Steering Committee of local department of social services representatives from small, medium and large counties including Commissioners, Directors of Services, Supervisors, and Staff Development Coordinators. The goal of the Committee is to design a competency-based model for all caseworkers and supervisors. The model will allow for improved evaluation of caseworker/supervisor competence, will be easily understood by all districts and agencies to guide their staff development plans, and will be flexible and nimble. This approach is designed to be more behavioral based and better able to meet the growing number of staff in child welfare, while also responding to emerging needs. It is anticipated that the outcome of the efforts of this Steering Committee will begin to roll out in the second quarter of 2017, and will be fully implemented within the following 12-18 months.

In the interim, a revised approach to the current Core Training and Child Protective Services Response Training (CPSRT) was developed to address the unexpected increase in CPS hiring throughout the state in 2015. This new program model is being considered a pilot program, breaking up Common Core into two sections, pre-and post-CPSRT.

Caseload size

Child welfare caseload size and staffing ratios are determined at the local level. Aside from the requirement in Social Services Law §423(1)(c) that a CPS unit must have sufficient staff of sufficient qualifications, New York State does not have statutory or regulatory caseload requirements for child welfare workers, and is legally prohibited from establishing them by Section 20-a of the Social Services Law.

Recommendation:

- **Improve outcomes for children in foster care**

Response:

As the table below shows, the rate of first admissions to foster care has steadily decreased over the last five years. The number of children in foster care in New York State has decreased from 53,902 children at the end of 1995 to 17,908 at the end of 2015.

Statewide: Number and Rate/1,000 of First Admissions into Foster Care (all ages)

Admission Year	Number of First Admissions	Rate/1,000
2010	9,866	2.3
2011	8,576	2.0
2012	8,069	1.9
2013	7,622	1.8
2014	7,594	1.8
2015	6,986	1.6

The CFSR permanency data show that NYS is performing better than average on the stability measure, but needs improvement in meeting national averages with regard to the four permanency measures. OCFS will continue to work to disaggregate the permanency data to assess exit type, child and case characteristic, zip code, etc. Information will be generated by district, agency, and unit to help identify areas with the best outcomes, thereby identifying potential opportunities for replication. Using child-level data and a structured Continuous Quality Improvement process, OCFS will continue working intensely with local departments of social services to impact practice outcomes.

Maltreatment in Foster Care

The federal definition of “maltreatment in foster care” includes the total number of indicated reports of maltreatment, regardless of perpetrator type, during the 12-month period. Therefore, maltreatment by a parent is included in this measure. In an effort to understand practice factors related to the “maltreatment in foster care” measure, OCFS has been reviewing reports of maltreatment for children in foster care where the parent is the indicated subject. An initial analysis of the data indicates that local social services districts are not always entering the incident date when indicating reports of abuse or maltreatment by the parent for children who are in foster care. It is possible that, if entered accurately, many of the incident dates would be excluded from the measure, as the incident occurred prior to the child coming into care. On November 23, 2015, OCFS disseminated an Administrative Directive notifying local departments of social services (LDSSs) of the requirement to enter the incident date into CONNECTIONS for every substantiated allegation of child abuse and maltreatment involving a child placed in out-of-home care.

It is expected that further review will assist OCFS in understanding the state’s practice around consolidating reports and identifying reports that are policy-related rather than a result of abuse or maltreatment. OCFS will continue to work with local departments of social services to provide technical assistance on the maltreatment in foster care indication. Simultaneously, OCFS will be diving more deeply into the case specifics for reports of children maltreated while in foster care and considering additional strategies to prevent abuse and maltreatment.

Adoption Targets

In addition to the KinGap targets described earlier in this report, OCFS establishes annual adoption targets for all counties for both children freed less than one year and children freed more than one year. Each local department of social services receives a county-specific list with identified target percentages. Counties report finalizations on a monthly basis to OCFS regional offices. For 2015, OCFS aligned adoption targets with the structure of the adoption incentive categories established in the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act” (P.L. 113-183). OCFS regional Permanency Specialists will be supporting the local district work in achieving target goals, especially in cases where barriers are identified that require intervention and/or collaboration at a higher level. Additionally, OCFS has taken aggressive steps to improve outcomes for foster care children through a variety of health, educational and well-being initiatives as summarized below:

Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care

In collaboration with the New York State Education Department (SED) and the Office of Court Administration, OCFS created a collaborative framework which can improve outcomes for youth. The objective is to make it possible for children in foster care to receive appropriate, coordinated educational supports and services, which will lead to increased high school graduation rates, and ultimately an increased number of youth prepared for the rigors of post-secondary education.

OCFS and SED successfully completed the first data transfer of educational records. The agencies are currently sharing K-12 educational data for youth in foster care, providing caseworkers a full educational record for children, and providing OCFS data which will be analyzed to fully understand the performance and educational needs of NYS' youth in care. In January of 2016, OCFS released 16-OCFS-ADM-01, providing information to local districts and voluntary agencies about the educational data now available in CONNECTIONS and how to utilize these records to improve outcomes for youth.

In 2015, OCFS began meeting with the State University of New York (SUNY) to develop a data sharing memorandum of understanding which would allow for the early identification of current and former youth in foster care on SUNY campuses. The aim is to develop a protocol for early implementation of wrap around services and supports to improve college readiness and graduation rates for our youth.

Nassau and Westchester counties and the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) are working with OCFS to pilot a model of educational collaboration for foster children by conducting collaborative meetings, assigning specific educational liaisons in the child welfare agencies and foster care liaisons in the school districts, and by working with the family court judges. The pilot includes efforts to reduce the numbers of children placed outside of their home school district through targeted foster parent recruitment. OCFS has adapted the Casey Family Program's Endless Dream educational liaison curriculum to make it NYS-specific. The first offering of this training was in June of 2015.

Permanency Summit

In 2015, OCFS convened a Permanency Summit in collaboration with Casey Family Programs and the Redlich Horowitz Foundation. The ten largest social services districts participated and learned about the use of data, and the importance of developing implementation teams when employing new strategies. Presentations focused on strategies that local social services districts could implement aimed at improving permanency for children in foster care. Each district received county and court data and developed an action plan.

Diligent Recruitment and Retention Award

Working with Welfare Research, Inc. OCFS developed a guide titled “Revitalizing Recruitment.” The guide provides practical strategies for finding and keeping foster, adoptive and kinship homes. The guide was distributed to local departments of social services as well as voluntary agencies.

Permanency Recruiters

OCFS is currently exploring with Wendy’s Wonderful Kids the possible infusion of permanency recruiters statewide. Currently, there are eight recruiters, with the hope of placing more recruiters in more counties and agencies who are working with children who have been in foster care for two or more years.

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Wendy’s Wonderful Kids is making a difference for thousands of children looking to be adopted—one child at a time. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption awards grants to public and private adoption agencies to hire adoption professionals who implement proactive, child-focused recruitment programs targeted exclusively on moving America’s longest-waiting children from foster care into adoptive families.

Title IV-E Waiver Implementation

The implementation of the New York Title IV-E Waiver continued through 2015 with New York City Administration for Children’s Services continuing training voluntary agencies on evidence-based intervention with the goal of reducing the length of time children are placed in family foster boarding homes, and to reduce re-entry of children into foster care once reunified with their families.

Permanency Roundtables

OCFS, with the support of Casey Family Programs, has been implementing Permanency Roundtables (PRTs). The purpose of PRTs is to provide a jurisdiction with the opportunity to examine its child welfare system and determine where the greatest need for expediting permanency lies. The process allows jurisdictions flexibility in the planning and implementation of permanency roundtables as they partner with OCFS and its consultants. PRTs are typically convened regarding youth with the permanency goal of “another planned living arrangement with a permanency resource”, who will age out within the year and have been in care for more than 18 months. Cases are reviewed monthly from the date of the roundtable to determine progress made on the action plan and to seek additional assistance from those involved with the child/family. In 2015, 99 cases were reviewed by PRTs statewide.

Medicaid Redesign

OCFS has been working with state agency partners on the redesign of the Medicaid system to improve patient care and health outcomes for the target populations, including children in foster care. Evidence suggests that children who have been placed in foster care have significantly higher rates of unmet health and mental health needs compared to children in general. OCFS is working with the Department of Health (DOH) to design a system of care for children in voluntary foster care agencies. OCFS and DOH envision a system that builds on the strengths and expertise of Voluntary Foster Care Agencies, Health Homes and Managed Care Organizations. Numerous activities are underway to incorporate voluntary agencies into the Health Home continuum and to take into account the unique needs of foster care children.

B2H

In 2015, 924 children (803 Serious Emotional Disturbance, 96 Developmental Disability, and 25 Medically Fragile) were newly enrolled in the B2H program, with approximately 3,100 children in total enrolled in B2H on any given day. Additionally, 245 children who were enrolled in B2H reached their permanency goal of adoption in 2015, making the overall number of children enrolled in B2H who have found permanency 2,195 since 2008. Over 900 adopted children continued to receive B2H services in 2015. Beginning in 2016, OCFS will track those children who “graduate” from B2H, meaning they no longer need the services due to significant improvement in their overall health and well-being.

Race Equity

Over the past year, OCFS has invested resources to provide facilitated Race Equity Learning Exchange (RELE) sessions for all OCFS managers, local department of social services and other stakeholders in many counties experiencing high or extreme rates of disparities in out-of-home placements for black children. These sessions, conducted by national expert Khatib Waheed, took place in Monroe, Genesee, Columbia, Rockland, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties.

In 2015, OCFS also began regional Race Equity Learning Communities (RELCs). These are intended to provide an opportunity for cross-system work on disparities that impact the child welfare system but may have origins in other systems, such as education, health and housing. OCFS Regional Office staff, reach out to various stakeholders to share data, find intersections in the work and convene work groups interested in reducing barriers to success, especially in communities with disproportionate numbers of children of color in less than optimal circumstances. One example is in New York City, where OCFS is working with ACS to revitalize efforts to implement a strategic planning process that was developed with the help of a national consultant to address the deep racial and ethnic disparities in foster care placement in the various boroughs.

OCFS is also convening meetings of a cross section of stakeholders from sister state agencies and the University of Albany School of Social Welfare to find ways to collaborate to address the racial and ethnic disparities that are prevalent in various systems. The goal of the effort is to identify and begin to work on reducing and eliminating these disparities in these systems in one or two communities, by sharing data, working with local residents to inform and educate where necessary, and to develop and/or implement promising and best practice strategies that can be shared across the systems.

The University of Albany, School of Social Welfare is also working with OCFS to develop a curriculum that can be implemented in the schools of social welfare across the state, which will help social work students have a foundation in anti-oppressive/anti-racist/racial equity work aimed at reducing and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities.

Tribal Nations

Quarterly meetings with Tribal representatives, which typically are caseworkers and supervisors, provide the opportunity for ongoing dialogue related to the work of the tribal nations on the Indian Child Welfare Act. These meetings also serve to identify training needs for the Tribes and in the development of training initiatives, and to strengthen service delivery to Native American children and families. These meetings also provide a forum to introduce other OCFS-supported initiatives such as court collaboration, Protective Services for Adults, and Chaffee Independent Living Services to Tribal and agency staff who need program support to serve their respective Tribal and urban Native American Communities.

Recommendation:

- **Promote the use of differential response to SCR reports**

Response:

OCFS is committed to expanding Differential Response as widely as possible in NYS. Differential Response provides flexibility to local districts to respond to some CPS reports with a services oriented approach instead of using an investigative approach for all reports. New York State's Differential Response pathway is called Family Assessment Response (FAR).

FAR is an alternative child protective response designed to achieve child safety through family engagement and collaborative partnerships. This is done through supportive and encouraging approaches, interventions, and services as well as comprehensive and holistic assessments of families. Caseworkers partner with families to identify strengths, needs, and solutions.

In 2011, the law was enacted making FAR permanent. There are currently 22 counties using FAR practice. In the past year, NYC expanded to an additional borough, Jefferson County started FAR, Westchester County expanded FAR to additional locations, and several other counties are exploring FAR as an alternative approach.

OCFS and its training partners provide local districts with assistance to assess readiness, and to implement and sustain FAR in a variety of ways including: support for new and developing programs; staff training and professional development opportunities; county-specific coaching; and ongoing performance monitoring, quality assurance, technical assistance and evaluation.

The impact evaluation in two FAR pilot counties in 2009/10 showed that FAR effectively reduced further penetration into the child welfare system over the next 24 months as evidenced by:

- Fewer foster care placements within 24 months of the target report
- Fewer petitions filed in Family Court
- Fewer child welfare services (e.g., preventive) cases

More recent analyses that compared FAR-eligible families assigned to the Investigation track to similar families assigned to the FAR track in 2013 and 2014 also showed more positive 12-month outcomes for families whose reports were addressed under FAR, including fewer Article 10 child abuse and neglect petitions and fewer foster care placements.

Recommendation:

- **Improve outcomes for children of incarcerated parents**

Response:

Maintaining connections for children with incarcerated parents is a challenge, especially when a parent is placed hundreds of miles away from the child. OCFS has been involved in the Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative and intends to pursue more extensive involvement over the next year. The NY Initiative, coordinated by the Osborne Association, utilizes a statewide partnership approach that engages individuals, public agencies, and community and faith-based organizations to develop policies and practices that support the needs and rights of children and youth whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system and to improve outcomes.

In addition to the NY Initiative, OCFS supports children of incarcerated parents and increases awareness of their needs through a variety of means, including:

- In 2015, OCFS distributed the Sesame Street Workshop publication, “Little Children, Big Challenges” at the White Eagle convening of social services district Directors of Services. The Directors were encouraged to share the materials with their workers and families in order to help facilitate a better understanding of the need to keep children and incarcerated parents connected, when safe to do so.

The publication is designed to:

- support, comfort, and reduce the anxiety, sadness, and confusion that young children may experience during the incarceration of a parent;
 - provide at-home caregivers with strategies, tips, and age-appropriate language they can use to help communicate with their children about incarceration; and
 - inform incarcerated parents themselves that they can parent from anywhere, and provide them with simple parenting tips highlighting the importance of communication
- Assisting in the development of the “See Us Support Us Campaign”. (<http://www.osborneny.org/about.cfm?pageID=23>). The campaign consisted of a number of activities to shed light on this population. It included a “snap shot week” for agencies to ascertain an accurate count of the population, and a two-part symposium on the cost of incarcerated parents, and policy and procedure issues, including those pertaining to arrest and protocols in the event children are involved.
 - OCFS policy directive *11-OCFS-ADM-7, Incarcerated Parents and Parents in Residential Substance Abuse Treatment with Children in Foster Care: Termination of Parental Rights and Other Issues* implemented Chapter 113 of the Laws of 2010 to require that social services districts, before filing a petition to terminate parental rights of an incarcerated parent, assess whether the parent maintains a meaningful role in the child’s life and the termination would be in the child’s best interests. In addition, the policy directive requires social services districts to complete the family service plan in consultation with the incarcerated parent, and to provide information to incarcerated parents outlining their legal rights and obligations.

In conclusion, OCFS’s mission is a commitment to addressing the contributing factors and devastating impacts of child abuse and maltreatment. It is clear that collaborative efforts are a necessity and strengthening partnerships will help to achieve improvements, which will be closely monitored over the next five years.