

Eastern Citizen Review Panel
Minutes from the Meeting
June 6, 2008

Attendees:

Stacy Alvord	Lance Jackson	Carrie Smith
Dianne Meckler	JoAnn Merriman	Ed Blatt
Mary McCarthy	Julia Bielawski	

OCFS: Terry Palumbo

SCAA: Karen Schimke Diane Mastin

Guests: Karen Pappis, CPS Case Supervisor, Albany County
Nancy Nicsevic, CPS Supervisor, Rensselaer County

Handouts:

Agenda

Charts highlighting Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare, national and NYS data
Race and Ethnicity: Path Through the Child Welfare System, PowerPoint Presentation given
November 16, 2007

Chart: Oversight of New York State's Child Welfare System

Calling the Question: Can Oversight Improve Outcomes in Public Child Welfare? PowerPoint
Presentation by Sue D. Steib, LCSW, Ph.D.

2007 Kids Count Essay and Data Brief, The Annie E. Casey Foundation publication

OCFS Response to the 2007 Report and Recommendations of New York State's Citizen Review
Panels

Chart: CRP Recommendations and the 2008-2009 NYS Budget

Administration for Children and Families Exit Conference giving preliminary feedback on NYS
CFSR

Addressing the Health Care Needs of Foster Care Children, First Focus, May 2008

Babies Sleep Safest Alone information

Minutes from the April 4, 2008 meeting

The meeting began with comments from Karen Pappis, CPS Supervisor in Albany County and Nancy Nicsevic, CPS Supervisor in Rensselaer County. Their comments addressed the difficult issues which challenge their ability to hire and retain a quality workforce who can skillfully address the complex needs of their clients. The positions are low-paying, require long and often unpredictable hours, and are stressful. They listed several concerns for which they would like to see solutions. They include: 1) reduced caseloads, 2) revisions to Connections, and 3) changes in civil service.

Albany County has caseloads totaling 20 to 23. Rensselaer County's caseloads range from 15 to 25, though it has reached 30 when they have staff vacancies. The optimum caseload size is 12 to 15 cases. The numbers increase when someone is on vacation or sick. With such high caseloads they can not reach the outcomes required nor do the work in the timeframes called for by law. In addition, 36% of their staff has worked in child welfare for less than a year. Those employees

can not pull full caseloads until fully trained. Experienced staff each takes more cases, increasing stress levels and leading to burnout.

They stated that entering records into Connections takes far too much time away from direct contact with families and children, time which they don't have. There is a lot of redundancy in the system which increases frustration. And, it is not intuitive; it took them 2 ½ days to figure out how to consolidate reports.

They encounter several challenges with the Civil Service system in hiring their candidates of choice. Candidates do not want to start a child welfare position and then find out they did not do well on the civil service exam. Exams are scheduled infrequently. Civil Service views these jobs as entry level and does not make them eligible for the training and education category. An arrangement with the School of Social Welfare has helped bring social work students into the field as interns and has allowed those students three opportunities to do well on the exam. Occasionally, someone who is a top candidate for a position does not pass the exam after three tries and can not be hired. The exam is a general test with questions that do not relate to the job duties in any way.

Recruiting and retaining staff is difficult, especially when the SCR is hiring. Staff can go to the SCR, earn more pay and not have to work overtime. They look for candidates for child welfare positions who see every situation uniquely, who have an open mind, and can look for ways to support families. When asked whether they would prefer to have reduced caseloads or higher salaries they stated without question that they would rather have reduced caseloads as having high caseloads is the reason most staff leave.

They would recommend policies that mandate caseloads, revise Connections, and require hands-on training for caseworkers.

Greg Owens, Director of Special Projects, Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development for the Office of Children and Family Services provided an update on OCFS and national work addressing Disproportionality and Racial and Ethnic Disparities. The national conversation around disproportionality and disparities is on whether or not to start with disparities realizing that disproportionality will be reduced in doing so. When some communities have found disproportionality, their answer has been to engage in further research. The next steps have to be taken with a goal of reducing impact on vulnerable populations. Some attention needs to be given to the Native American community. Although a smaller number of children are affected, a higher proportion of them are at risk for very poor outcomes. Factors which contribute to the inequity have to do with how decisions are based for white children vs. minority children, cultural differences in terms of looking to the system for access to services vs. ability to address needs within the family, and public policy which has created institutional and structural disparities. While there is a wide variance in the child welfare system across counties in New York State at the entry point into CPS, all wind up in the extreme disparities category with regard to placement into foster care. OCFS will begin their work by building cultural competence within the agency. They are also working with two specific counties to support those counties efforts to address disparities. There is some interest in expanding this work to other state agencies and an intra-agency group is interested in reconvening. Leadership will be

key to this work and must reflect the community served. OCFS work with their fatherhood initiative, LGBT policy and girl's task force will serve as models and will align under this umbrella.

Panel members reviewed OCFS' response to their 2007 Report and Recommendations. The response highlighted themes related to the importance of partnerships, data collection, cross systems issues, and child welfare financing. Panel members received an overview of the OCFS forum, Inspiring Leadership, implementation of the Family Assessment Response, issues and legislation at the federal level, and the new Babies campaign. Three panel members will make visits to Department of Budget staff and legislative staff, explaining recommendations in the panel's report and advocating for preservation of preventive funding. SCAA staff will draft talking points, arrange visits, and schedule a conference call. They agreed to oppose legislation under consideration in the Assembly and Senate requiring the taping of calls made to the SCR.