

ECRP Meeting Notes
September 11, 2009

Attendees:

Mary McCarthy	Carrie Smith	Dianne Meckler
Lance Jackson	Ed Blatt	Julia Bielawski
JoAnn Merriman		
<i>OCFS Staff:</i> Renee Hallock		
<i>SCAA Staff:</i> Karen Schimke	Diane Mastin	
<i>Guests:</i> Commissioner Jolly	Lesley Dudzek-Andrews	
Melissa Donahue	Gail Geohagen	Hector Ramirez

Handouts:

Agenda

NYS Office of Children and Family Services' Response to the 2008 Report and Recommendations of NYS Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

David Lansner's comments to the response

Panel Advocacy Discussion: Effective Strategies

Chart: NYS CRP Recommendations and Results: 2005-2009

2009 CRP Report Outline

2009 Report Timeline

Protect a child at every turn, Strengthening welfare workforce helps families, Op-ed by Mary McCarthy, Times-Union, May 3, 2009

Outline: Caseworker's Day

The nanny state, The Economist September 5th, 2009

OCFS FAR data (/3/09)

Orange County Children's Services Family Assessment Response

March 6, 2009 Minutes

The meeting began with introductions and a brief discussion regarding the article in The Economist. Commissioner Jolly and Lesley Dudzek-Andrews presented information about Orange County's Family Assessment Response (FAR) and took panel member questions.

Orange County was added as the seventh county in the FAR pilot. They took their time assessing how to implement the new track and knew from the beginning that they wanted to implement it throughout their entire CPS unit. They were challenged internally by civil service rules, job descriptions, and differences in pay grades. Externally, community partners have looked to CPS to act as the "police" to win cooperation with families. Now CPS workers take on a different role. Community partners, including school district personnel, have had to make adjustments.

Orange County began their FAR pilot in January of this year. To date, 800 cases have been assessed using the FAR response. Each of their seven units (their full CPS team) have caseworkers assigned to FAR. All but military academy cases are viewed for a FAR response. Initially, a large percentage of their cases were referred to the FAR response; now about 40% to 45% are assigned. The FAR philosophy has

permeated all CPS work; FAR changes the focus to the family and their needs. About 17% of the cases assigned to FAR have switched back to the investigative track. Track switching is a bit more difficult as it requires a new report. In their opinion, families are benefitting from the FAR response and are more receptive to it. Regarding the high number of FAR cases closed without services, most are reports involving custody battles. They have been able to help some families right away and close their case. They have always had a 70% unfounded rate in the county. The flexible funding for services has been invaluable because the funds are so easily accessible.

Data on FAR is limited at this time. FAR cases are not compared with cases in the investigative track since FAR cases are not indicated or unfounded. OCFS has yet to look at recurrence rates for FAR cases; they must decide whether or not and when to consolidate FAR reports.

Orange County decided to participate in the VERA Institute project out of frustration with the change in PINS law and increased education neglect reports. Schools often report to CPS because they are looking for action quickly. Schools are now turning to residential placements through CSEs.

At this time, they need 12 additional staff to get their workload ratios where they need to be. They expect no additional funding until the economy recovers in a couple years. The county has been highly impacted by the downturn in the economy as it is a bedroom community to NYC and has seen a 16% increase in public assistance cases. TANF caseloads are now 135 to 140 per worker and they have no administrative funding to add staff. Their caseload target is 90 to 95 per worker. Their priority is to push the paperwork needed for unemployment benefits. They do not have the personnel to give any attention to securing employment. Housing is also affected due to the scarcity of rental units and lag in moving out of a rental into home ownership. Homeless shelters are seeing stays of 60 days or more rather than the more typical 31 days. Caseloads will right-size about nine months after the recession ends. Services in Orange County are particularly vulnerable to any cuts in COPS funding.

Panel members then had the opportunity to discuss casework practice with a supervisor and caseworker from Albany County. Discussion centered on high caseloads, lack of electronic equipment out in the field, the difficulty with Connections, and the difficulty engaging families with high caseloads. Albany has one teaming unit and will have another shortly. They expressed frustration with the number of bogus anonymous reports which take a lot of their time away from serious cases and the high number of ed neglect cases that should remain with the schools. Prosecuting false reports is very difficult. The family has to write to the district attorney with a complaint and the DA must prove malicious intent.

Panel members discussed the outline for their 2009 annual report and areas for possible recommendations. They asked that the three panels meet for a full day retreat in the spring to discuss their future work and means for becoming more effective. A skilled facilitator will be needed for the retreat.

Future panel meetings could use NASW facilities at 188 Washington St.