

Eastern/Western Joint Panel meeting  
Minutes of the Meeting  
Syracuse, New York  
October 13, 2006

*Present:*

Stacy Alvord            Mary McCarthy            Julia Smead Bielawski  
Anita Welborn

*Guests:* Linda Bayless            Carrie Smith  
*OCFS staff:* Richard Nells            Linda Kurtz  
*SCAA staff:* Karen Schimke            Diane Mastin

The meeting began with a welcome and introductions. This meeting was to have been a joint meeting of the Western and Eastern Panels. However, an unexpected snow storm west of Rochester precluded any of the Western panel members from attending. Panel members thanked Dick Nells for his long time support to the panels and wished him well with his upcoming retirement. Updates on the activities and interests of the Eastern panel and Western panel were provided.

Linda Bayless, Senior Associate from The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, then spoke about Family Engagement Strategies. She began her work in child protection in 1970 as a caseworker in Onondaga County where her job was to terminate parental rights. Over time the law, policy and people's interest have come together to make the system better. She defined family engagement as being able to see the world through the parents' eyes and to connect with what they are experiencing. She mentioned that families will not invest with the CPS worker until they trust that worker; then they can move forward.

Often, caseworkers do not have the time to make that connection with a family. A caseworker often has less than three hours to investigate whether or not the event occurred and to make a decision as to what to do. The timeframe does not give a worker time to understand the underlying issues behind why this happened and what is needed to keep it from happening in the future. She stated her belief that cases are closed without services because the investigation often stops when the facts are known and does not go any further.

Training, practice and mentoring can help develop individual caseworker skills. Supervision is key. The caseworker's attitude matters. Bayliss gave the example of families who are drug and alcohol involved. These families represent 80% of the families who become involved with CPS. The caseworker who sees the problem as a disease will respond in one way. The worker who sees it as a moral issue will respond in another. Cultural differences, racial differences, and poverty all are factors.

Bayless suggested that casework be solution focused with the family involved in giving their vision and developing the strategies to reach that vision. Teaming is important but caseworkers often lack the time or resources to work as a team. She gave Alabama as an example of a state that mandates this practice for every family.

Linda Kurtz, Director of the Rochester Regional Office of OCFS presented information about New York State's efforts to engage families. She is the Strategy Coordinator for Family Engagement.

She began by talking about families in New York State who are involved in the child protective system. Most of the cases reported to the Central Registry are chronic neglect cases. Most of the families for whom a neglect report has been filed with the Registry feel an extraordinary sense of isolation and a huge mistrust of systems. They lack resources. Their story is one of chronic neglect that can span generations. For these families, the incident for which they have been reported is not out of the ordinary. Often alcoholism, domestic violence, and mental illness are factors.

OCFS efforts to engage families are focusing on the use of family meetings conducted by a facilitator. OCFS has offered \$400,000 as seed money to local districts to support this work and is working to develop the capacity in the state to hold family meetings. 25 counties have been selected to begin working with family meetings. She stated a clear preference for counties to use a neutral facilitator to conduct family meetings and for families to have time alone during the meeting to discuss their plan. Each county will decide how to implement the family meeting. No one model will be used.

OCFS also held focus groups with parents to learn from them what it would take to engage families. They learned that those who were most fearful about involvement with CPS were those families for whom their case was unfounded. Those who felt the best about their involvement with CPS were those families whose children were put into foster care. They indicated that the first letter from CPS with information regarding their rights was not helpful unless a caseworker made a visit and gave it to them. They also stated that finding support and resources through their informal networks was more helpful than the support offered through institutional help. OCFS is beginning to explore a pilot using parent consultants, parents who have gone through an investigation themselves who will then mentor another family with a report through the investigation.

Workers need time to carry out these family engagement practices and supervisors need time to support this work. The recurrence data that comes from Connections is helpful in understanding casework practice in the state. She asked each of the commissioners in her region to look at every case for which there was a recurrence for answers as to whether or not there was a lack of family engagement, a lack of resources to support the family, or something else that might have been missed. OCFS will soon release a report on family engagement in the state.

Bayliss and Kurtz answered questions and gave some specific examples of communities engaged in community child protection. 1) Jacksonville Florida has organized identifiable communities with the highest incidence of founded reports and conducted a block by block inventory of resources and people that could help. The result was a community that took pride in its ability to take care of each other. 2) Alabama engaged the faith community with a speakers group that included families and put together a wish list for families. They found support for everything from provision of bikes for kids to mentoring for families.

The most important thing the panel can do is to turn around the perception that what is needed at this time from CPS is more reports and more investigations. What is needed is a public education that child protection is a community responsibility. More preventive services at the front end are needed.

Panel members then began a discussion leading to a recommendation on family engagement to include in their 2006 report, the contents of that report, and their work for 2007. Panel members asked SCAA to draft one set of operating principles or by-laws for all three panels. They asked that the 2007 budget include funds to bring in speakers for their meetings.

**Ideas toward a Recommendation on Family Engagement:** Family engagement as the global, overarching theme.

- Prevention
  - Community CPS – differential response
  - Trust fund, Home Visiting, teen pregnancy prevention programs
- Family team
- Infrastructure
  - Workload rec.
- Marketing
  - Public outreach – using simple message that this can happen to any family – a cluster of problems might have happened – this is how it manifested. This could be me.
  - What is Community Child Protection that works? It is not CPS. We need not just open cases but need people who are open to caring. For CPS: need to find the facts and connect, not just find the facts and protect
  - Tom’s bumper sticker – I am accountable to the children of NYS
  - Mary Richman – Karen will talk to

**Ideas for 2007 Work Plan – Eastern Panel**

- Home and Community Based Waivers – since there were significant increases in the number of slots and a concern about the availability of providers for the current waivers.
- Correspondence with parents – rather than a recommendation for 2006, work on this will proceed.
- Recurrence rates – indicated, unfounded and closed  
Dev. Hypotheses about these cases, what additional data is needed.  
Output. Additional data request to OCFS.
- Workload standards – looking forward to the study and any recommendations coming out of the study due Dec. 1st. If a recommendation to include in the 2006 report is possible, will do that.
- Child Fatality Teams – need time to understand the new law and how it will be implemented.  
education CRP on CFRT training, protocols
- Disproportionality – with CPS – ask Sania to visit ECRP,  
Possible speakers to consider: Ruth McGroy – in Texas, now in California – good speaker  
Megan McLaughlin as a possible speaker
- Panel chairs meet with state elected leadership

**Annual report –**

Addition to the mailing list to receive report: schools of social work, school superintendents.

Content:

- Overview of legislation -Need to say – that the legislators did nothing for those families that come through the front door, who are the angriest, 60% of the families do not come into your system, another percentage are founded and closed.
- Profiles: Instead of panel member profiles
  - 1) Caseworker profile – from the eyes of the worker – what does family engagement mean to you
  - 2) Family profile
  - 3) Child who has experienced the system. (from the YIP group)
- Article on Community Child Protection  
Solution – who is responsible: you - it takes a village, you are the village.  
Movement, campaign, slogan

**2007 budget –**

Include dollars to bring in speakers  
Budget should reflect meeting objectives