

NYC CRP
Minutes of the Meeting
September 6, 2007

Attendees:

David Lansner Eric Brettschneider Jocelyn Brown
Yvonne Plummer Mathea Rubin
OCFS Staff: Renee Rider Linda Brown
ACS Staff: Martin Brown, Deputy General Counsel
 Jan Flory, Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Child Protection
 Joe Cardieri, Counsel
SCAA Staff: Karen Schimke, Diane Mastin

Handouts:

Agenda
Minutes of the July 12, 2007 meeting
OCFS Response to the Panel's 2006 Report and Recommendations
Chart: 2007 Child Welfare Legislation
OCFS 8/20/07 Press Release announcing Bridges to Health
2008-09 Executive Budget Call Letter, 8/16/07

Articles:

Baby Beaten on S.I. Dies as Life Support Is Removed, *The New York Times*, 8/14/07
Creating a Village to Foster a Child, *The New York Times*, 8/16/07
City foster kid abuse leaps 57%, Daily News, 8/19/07

Prep Materials for Oct. 18th Joint Panel Meeting

- o Draft Agenda
- o Draft Timeline and content suggestions for annual report
- o Chart: Tool to support drafting of panel recommendations
- o Center for the Study of Social Policy Information sheet, The Race + Child Welfare Project Fact Sheet 1
- o Race Matters Consortium: *Examining the Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color in the Child Welfare System* Disproportionality
- o *Synthesis of Research on in Child Welfare: An Update*, Executive Summary
- o *Places to Watch: promising Practices to Address Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare*, Executive Summary

The meeting began with introductions and a quick overview of several pieces of legislation that were recently signed by the Governor. Panel chairs informed the panel that Karen Schimke was recently appointed Co-Chair of the Advisory Board to the Children's Cabinet. Panel members discussed their interest in Differential Response legislation and their interest in engaging ACS staff in a dialogue regarding any future interest ACS may have in offering such a response in New York City. OCFS staff gave an overview of the agency's response to the panel's 2006 recommendations and changes in the organizational structure of the agency.

SCAA staff reviewed the information in the meeting packets related to the Joint Panel meeting on October 18th. Panel members are asked to review the materials before the meeting and come to the Oct. 18th meeting with suggestions regarding their recommendations. Those who can not attend should forward their thoughts before the meeting to the Co-Chairs or to the Panel Coordinator.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a discussion with ACS leadership regarding three themes that the panel identified out of the case reviews they conducted: 1) the need for some kind of appeal process, 2) need for improved supervision, and 3) the qualifications, training, skill building, screening, and follow-up with new staff. Panel members reviewed their discussion from the July 12th meeting and frustration with what they perceive as a lack of or slow progress towards change. They reiterated their belief that the ACS administration has brought in experienced talented people, instituted reforms, and set in place good policies. They noted that these reforms and policies are not always followed by supervisors or by caseworkers. They stated their concern about a lack of accountability and better management needed to enforce the policies.

Their questions: Can the child welfare system work? Are children safer now with such a system? Are there other solutions? For instance, physical abuse increases as family income decreases. It is seven times higher in low-income families than in middle class families. Is the solution found in financial supports to families? Is it time for a more omnibus piece of legislation? How do we know reforms are working? Are evaluations conducted? Is there a disconnect in the implementation of policies? Since Nixzmary, has ACS taken too broad a sweep, pulling in families to be investigated that should never have been reported? Is there a way the panel can work with ACS, support their reforms, and move forward with these concerns?

ACS leadership staff reiterated their concerns for the same issues and talked about their efforts to move forward. This work draws their attention daily. They strive to ensure that the primary mission of the agency is put into place and that much of their work centers on improving practice. The commissioner has tackled two big initiatives that are helping: 1) IOC and 2) Child Stat. They are optimistic that both of these will work and show improved outcomes but they need time.

At Child Stat sessions, ACS leadership use data to identify progress made and trends, use case reviews to challenge the approach used with a particular family and the thinking used in assessing the family situation. These meetings are held with mid-level managers in each zone of the city and all borough commissioners. Supervisors and caseworkers are invited to attend. ACS leadership wants to reach a point at which they have confidence in the basic level of practice used by ACS staff across the city. They stated that the way Connections is designed has not helped them build decision making skills within their units. Connections works like a check list and leads staff to do their work in a prescribed way. They pointed out that their management structure has not promoted accountability by pushing decision making up the ladder to those who have never met the family. They found that 60% of their cases required some kind of approval by managers. They want to reduce that number and have supervisors make more of those decisions. Lower level staff are concerned about taking on that responsibility. By October, they will have a proposal to assure critical thinking is done on every case readied for discussion. They work with five boroughs, each the size of a small city, and manage over 3,000 staff each day. The structure that has been in place has not valued the critical thinking skills of individual workers.

In addition, they have worked with borough leadership to improve their management, formed an internal Task Force with 3 work groups to review recruitment/hiring, training and retention of staff. They have identified several improvements to the hiring procedures that are in process of implementation. They hire and train an average of 80 new staff each month and have had a turnover rate of 25%. More needs to be done to make improvements in their work with the Dept. of Education.

Panel members stated their interest in continuing this conversation. They asked that future panel meetings provide more information regarding Child Stat and implementation of Differential Response.