

New York State Western Citizen Review Panel
May 13, 2005, 12:00 – 1:00
Minutes

Attending:

James A. Vazzana	Mark Lazzara	Kathleen Crowley
Ellen Kennedy	Dennis Wittman	Stefan Perkowski
Kathryn Bryk-Friedman	Christine Schnars	

OCFS staff: Richard Nells, Thomas Hess

SCAA staff: Diane Mastin

Meeting handouts: Series of four articles in Buffalo News
Request by Western New York Hispanics and Friends Civic Association, and letter from panel
Selected pages from Guidelines and Protocols for Citizen Review Panels
S371-b law, OCFS Legal Dept. answers to questions, and Options for panel consideration
Draft work plan
February 25, 2005 Meeting Minutes
Citizen Review Panel Resources
Articles: Treasure the Children, Letter to Editor by Mary McCarthy, Researchers Tested Drugs on Foster Kids
Four pamphlets on Prevention of Child Sex Abuse

The meeting began at 12:20 with a discussion regarding panel response to press inquiries and protocols/procedures for handling requests for case reviews. OCFS gave their legal department's opinion that the Citizen Review Panels are not subject to the Open Meeting Law since the panels are not a governmental entity. Panel members were reminded that any request from the press should go directly to the panel chair. No one else is authorized to speak on behalf of the panel.

Kathleen Crowley stated that due to a conflict of interest, she is not able to participate in any discussion regarding the request for a case review before the panel. The meeting went into executive session to discuss the request from the Western New York Hispanics and Friends Civic Association for the panel to conduct a case review. A sub-group was appointed to review the options available to the panel, to find out further information as to what reviews are being conducted, and to make a recommendation to the panel. Ellen Kennedy, Mark Lazzara, and Christine Schnars agreed to participate on the work group. Panel Chairman suggested that Augusta Welsh be contacted for her interest as well. The panel agreed to send a letter to the group making the request as a follow-up. SCAA staff will draft the letter for review.

Panel members then agreed to conduct the remainder of their agenda by email. Another meeting of the panel may have to be scheduled in June. Panel members briefly discussed the upcoming meeting with Commissioners and/or Directors of Services for the Departments of Social Services in the 17 county area of the Western region.

Western Citizen Review Panel Discussion with Commissioners of Social Services

Friday, May 13, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00

Present: Vicki Fegley, Deputy Commissioner, Allegany County
Deborah Fuest, Acting Commissioner, Wyoming County
Philip Gerhart, Director of Services, Wayne County
Eileen Kirkpatrick, Commissioner, Genesee County
Kirk Maurer, Commissioner, Chautauqua County
Kathleen McGoldrick, Director of Social Services, Cattaraugus County
Jerry Moran, Director of Services, Genesee County
Rich Neilans, Director of Services, Orleans County
Kim Ripley, Supervisory of Children & Family Services, Chemung County
Davis Rumsey, Director of Services, Wyoming County
Eileen Tiberio, Director of Services, Ontario County
Deretha Watterson, Director of children & Family Services, Chemung County
Michael Weiner, Commissioner, Erie County
Jim Cornell, Director of Services, Livingston County
Linda Brown, Regional Director, OCFS
Gwen Bennett, Child Abuse Specialist II, OCFS
Western Panel members, OCFS staff, and SCAA staff in attendance for the prior panel meeting.

Guests introduced themselves and gave an overview of their service numbers, latest trends and concerns, and staffing issues.

The following areas were highlighted:

1) **Staffing:**

Approximately half stated concern for high staff turnover and finding qualified candidates. Of those experiencing high turnover rates, two reasons were cited: 1) losing caseworkers to higher paying positions in probation and other departments and 2) difficulty with late hours required for the work.

Some individual solutions to high turnover and other issues: putting new staff into CPS, reducing the pay differential so there is more parity across departments, contracting out for after-hours work with not-for-profits, CCSI Tier II meetings (including school personnel), family conferencing, putting juvenile officers in schools (most are former CPS workers), and developing an agreement for services with Native American leaders.

Of those who reported low staff turnover, several strategies were used to support CPS workers including: rotating in and out of CPS every two years, rotation to initiate reports in order to support others in completing their paper work

requirements, receiving training in other areas before going into or being assigned a full caseload in CPS after 1 year.

Many mandate set hours in the office to complete paper work.

Several indicated that any requirement to mandate a BS in Social Work would lead to difficulties, especially in rural counties. Also mentioned: an aging workforce with many retirements anticipated in the next 5 years. Many mentioned the need for bi-lingual staff. One mentioned the need for staff who are critical decision makers and able to negotiate across systems.

2) Trends in case reports:

Several mentioned seeing an increase in reports with 1) alcohol/drug abuse, 2) domestic violence involvement, and 3) parent/child mental health issues, and 4) a decrease in reports with sex abuse.

Also mentioned: increases in cases where the parent is between the ages of 16-25 with no adult support and educational neglect. Some are now receiving reports on children of those who were previously in foster care. One mentioned an increase in sex abuse cases related to computer pornography and another an increase in false reports from those with custody cases. One mentioned that her county is seeing an increase of parents who are walking away from their children once the children reached age 16 or 17.

Another issue of recent development: as the price of gasoline keeps going up, families will have difficulty getting to needed services, especially in the rural areas.

Almost all mentioned their struggle in managing increases in or fluctuations with caseload numbers in an atmosphere of declining resources. Mentioned was a new round of funding RFP's to replace some of the past funding for alcohol and prevention services and co-location of services that the counties had found so helpful.

3) Dual Track:

Chautauqua County has been able to offer preventive services along with CPS investigations, a community based system (dual track) that they call SAFE. They agreed to share information about their design with the others present.

One Director of Service expressed concern over Dual Track because they worry that leverage would be lost for getting families who are not interested into needed services. One Commissioner stated that Dual Track could help with the educational neglect cases they receive.

4) Special requests for support made by individuals or several persons in attendance (note: there was no attempt to reach consensus on these items nor a vote taken):

- 1) Mandate common CORE training for all child welfare workers.
- 2) Encourage OCFS to update the program manual and make it available on-line.
- 3) Training for mandated reporters, especially teachers that includes information about what CPS is and what the system can do. Linda Brown stated that CDHS has beefed up the training that State Ed conducts and that local DSS departments should have the new curriculum.
- 4) Provide access on-line to all OCFS training so workers can refresh what they learned at any time. Linda Brown stated that the guidebook is on-line currently.
- 5) Support from the state to free time for workers to conduct more training in the field to law enforcement and others. Currently do not have the staffing to do all the training requested of them.
- 6) In regards to Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS), need for an earlier heads-up from the state so there is an ability at the local level to strategize and plan. Asked that such changes have a requirement to consult with local districts and that the state appreciate the increased administrative demands and burdens. Funding has to be predictable and stable for a period of time, otherwise not-for-profits can not take the risk of incurring expenses while awaiting a signed contract for ongoing or new services.
- 7) Two asked that a discussion of caseload standards be resurrected. Local DSS need the backing that such standards provide when they go to their Board of Supervisors or County Legislators with their budget requests.
- 8) Panel members advocate for the services DSS provides at the local level. Expressed a need for a voice for these services over the outcry for funding for cultural institutions and parks.
- 9) Direction and support to emphasize in local communities that these children receiving child welfare services are all our children and that the community needs to step up to the plate, care about them, and volunteer .