

Eastern Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
March 3, 2022 • 10:00 AM

Attendees:

Eastern Panel Members

Mary McCarthy

Carrie Smith

Kellyann Kostyal-Larrier

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward

Ellen Unruh

Liz Roberts

Guests

Jed Burrs – Otsego County

Rita Wood – Ulster County

David Haase - OCFS

Handouts

Joint Panels Meeting Minutes 2-1-22

NYC Panel Meeting Agenda 3-3-22

“Blending and Braiding Funds to Support Home Visiting,” Prevent Child Abuse New York

“Child Abuse or Maltreatment Reports to the Central Register Must Include the Caller’s Name and Contact Information,” Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition New York

Welcome | Mary McCarthy

Ms. McCarthy opened the meeting by introducing the present Panel members and the CRP’s work.

Discussion with Jed Burrs, Senior Caseworker, Otsego County

CRP led the discussion with a set of questions to Mr. Burrs leading with the current state of child welfare workforce. Mr. Burrs noted they are currently understaffed and overwhelmed with cases. They are actively receiving applications for open positions, but with few meeting the strict Otsego County requirements. He further noted the turnover rate is high; assigning high caseload to newly trained workers may be a factor.

Regarding the impact of COVID on reporting, Mr. Burrs stated that at the beginning of the pandemic, the number of reports were half of the typical amount they receive. They believe this was due to children’s lack of interaction with mandated reporters (teachers, counselors, coaches, etc.) For the following six months, there was an influx of reports, with a larger number than usual being serious cases (sexual and physical abuse.) These cases were possibly correlated families being quarantined together for longer periods during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, staff have been working well even through the challenges faced. A notable amount have had COVID, and staff have had the option to do minor work from home.

Restrictions during the pandemic opened up more use of video conferencing, which the county feels has benefits.

Discussion with Rita Wood, Ulster County Deputy Commissioner

Discussion was led by CRP inquiring the current state of Ulster County staff applications and turnovers. Ms. Wood noted they have a high rate of turnover which produces a domino effect: retirements lead to promotions filled from other departments, leading to more vacancies.

Regarding COVID restrictions, Ms. Wood noted that both caseworkers and families were nervous about resuming face-to-face contact. Masks are a barrier to observing non-verbal communications from families. Caseworkers were hesitant to return to in-person services and the team had small outbreaks during the holiday time. They temporarily worked remotely but have been full time in-person since July.

Ms. Wood stated they are learning as they go with the implementation of the Qualified Individual (QI) assessments required under Family First legislation. The county continues to prioritize placement with kin and maximizing preventive services.

Ms. Wood noted that their team seeks to prioritize quality time with families during home visits, but the demands of paperwork make this challenging. The workers have access to iPads and iPhones in the field, and the county has tried to streamline forms and data entry. Safety of caseworkers during home visits is supported by two caseworkers going together, or the assistance of law enforcement if needed. In terms of malicious reports to the SCR, the county tracks the number of harassing reports and the regional office helps them address.

OCFS Updates

OCFS noted the protocol for screening malicious calls made to the Statewide Central Register (SCR). If suspected to be malicious, calls are routed to the SCR supervisor (all calls are recorded). The supervisor emphasizes to the caller the ramifications of false reporting, including potential criminal prosecution. If deemed malicious, OCFS sends the report to the county for investigation. Counties may initiate prosecution of malicious callers; OCFS was not aware of the number or outcomes of prosecutions of malicious callers at the county level at this time.

With regards to recent changes in CPS policy reflected in revisions to the CPS manual, OCFS stated these changes are covered in a statewide training through WebEx, and there is the possibility of refresher courses. From there, it is the counties' responsibility to implement practice changes.

Regarding removals from kinship foster homes, OCFS said there are no policies that differentiate between kin and non-kin removal protocols; both types of foster homes are assessed in the same way.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:30 AM.

Next CRP Meetings:

Eastern CRP – May 19, 2022 9:00 AM

Joint CRP – June 9, 2022 10:00 AM