

Eastern Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
September 14, 2023 ○ 1:00 PM

Attendees:

Eastern Panel Members

Carrie Jefferson Smith

Mary McCarthy

Sharon Chesna

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward

Liz Roberts

Felicia LaClair

Guests

David Haase, OCFS

Andrea Sweda , Director of ICAP, OCFS

Anthony Green, OCFS

Welcome – Mary McCarthy

The meeting commenced at 1:03 p.m.

OCFS Discussion

Mr. David Haase from OCFS brought up the topic of aftercare within the context of Family First, expressing that it has been somewhat challenging to implement smoothly. There has been confusion regarding how to provide aftercare and where to offer it. He sought feedback from the panels and their contacts regarding aftercare and its impact on Family First agencies and children. Mrs. Mary McCarthy suggested putting the topic on the agenda for the next upcoming meeting and inviting commissioners to discuss it. She also mentioned that Paul Brady, the executive director of NYPWA, would be addressing the Western Panel meeting, making it a suitable discussion point for the statewide initiative on aftercare and its rollout, adding that the request for workshop proposals from NYPWA might already be out, making it a relevant agenda item for Paul's presence. Mr. Haase mentioned that NYPWA has a session planned for January and suggested having a discussion on aftercare during that time, as it has implications for federal funding. Mrs. Sharon Chesna mentioned that in Broome, Family First has been going well overall. David Haase sought CRP assistance in conducting a review.

The discussion moved on to the vision and evaluation of Family Resource Centers in the context of Family First implementation and the equity agenda. Mr. Haase provided a statement derived from Rene Hallock, Associate Commissioner at OCFS. “The Family Opportunity Centers (FOC) are center-based programs that will afford parents and children the opportunity to get services and supports the need within their own community. As noted in the state Family First Presentation Plan, it’s OCFS’ hope that they can reach more families prior to reaching the child welfare system. One way to assist that effort are FOCs. They are required to provide reports on their deliverables, as outlined in their contract. Our collaboration with SED will also help in enhancing school outcomes for children who are offered support through the family opportunity centers.” Mrs. Chesna announced that Mothers and Babies was awarded one of

the FOC grants. She mentioned that the grant's focus aligns with the historical initiatives funded under OCFS' Family Resource Centers, which primarily aim at preventing child abuse and neglect. She added that they have been able to fund these initiatives without state support since 2013 and are eager to expand their efforts. The contract for this grant is set to begin on January 1 and will run through 2026. The announcement date for OCFS awards was not certain, but updates would be shared through their newsletter.

OCFS is undergoing a reorganization, and they have established a new unit focused on health disparities and health equity, led by Candi Griffin-Jenkins. Mr. Haase provided a summary provided by Mrs. Griffin-Jenkins, Director of the Social Determinants of Health Bureau (SDOH). "We're in the division of child welfare and community services, and we've established this bureau committed to addressing the social determinants of health, and the commission's experience to marginalized groups and its systemic inequities that negatively impact how people are born, grow, work, live, and age. In addition, we will also incorporate maternal wellness, and trauma-informed practices, and address the impact of adverse childhood experiences. This bureau is dedicated to applying the SDOH lens to the policies and initiatives geared in improving these conditions across all varies of the agency and mitigating the impact of social determinants of health and children and families the agency serves across New York State. The bureau's goals address systemic issues, including disparities, ineffective policies and practices faced by marginalized members of the state, to identify and unify the work being done internally and externally to eliminate duplicative efforts and maximize resources allocated, work collaboratively across New York State agencies to create a comprehensive statewide blueprint for addressing SDOH and ACES, and to utilize these key areas to guide all steps of the process: social justice, poverty, education, and trauma with a focus on child welfare."

There is a question about whether the Department of Health (DOH) also has a similar bureau, and it's unclear if they are working collaboratively or if the responsibility has transitioned from DOH to OCFS. The discussion also mentioned ongoing collaboration with DOH on various projects, including the Institute of Mental Disease project. Lastly, there is a call for coordination and integration among these efforts, especially in light of the state's application for a federal 1115 waiver that focuses on social determinants. A member suggested that the WRI interns research the SDOH language, as it aligns with social work thinking.

Other ad hoc items discussed were the Eastern panel's general agenda. One member expressed appreciation for their meeting with the acting and interim commissioner and noted that the vision and direction are clear. She suggested inviting the same participants in March for an update. Mr. Haase mentioned their desire to have a meeting with the same participants in December, which Mrs. McCarthy viewed as a high priority.

The discussion delved into questions about the opportunities presented by the vision, particularly regarding family and community engagement. With the panel emphasizing the need to measure the effectiveness of these engagement efforts, especially in the context of bringing people into regional offices. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of creating a supportive environment for youth and families to participate and discussed the need for evaluation. Mr. Haase introduced the concept of "Signs of Safety" as a new paradigm in child welfare CPS, emphasizing the importance of looking at strengths and listening to families, with

the panel agreeing to this approach and adding that it's essential to ensure safety not only for families but also for the workforce and consider systemic factors.

The discussion also touched on the workforce crisis and the need for efforts to address it effectively. Participants expressed the need for evaluation strategies to assess the impact of their initiatives and ensure they achieve the intended outcomes.

Debrief

The debrief brought up curiosity about the purpose of the newly created division or bureau, wondering if it's akin to an internal task force seeking funding or addressing duplication. A member is personally acquainted with Candi and acknowledges her willingness to advocate for change, though she recognizes that influence may diminish in a large bureaucracy. Additional concerns about burnout and evaluation were brought up, emphasizing their relevance to all aspects of child welfare and their impact on workers. She raises the question of how these individuals are being supported, noting the high burnout rates prevalent in the field.

Case Review Protocols

A member provided an overview of the case submitted to the Eastern panel and the discussion held behind it, emphasizing the need to establish a protocol for future case reviews. Highlighting a focus on determining steps for review and the appropriate responses to families. Another member pointed out the specialized team involved in child fatality reviews, highlighting the importance of confidentiality agreements. The task force's goal is not to determine if a case is founded or unfounded, but rather to identify systemic changes that can prevent similar incidents in the future. She also emphasized the significance of hearing from families affected by these cases.

The question was raised, enquiring of the best approach for responding to families or taking action. Instead of a broad discussion, it was suggested to gather input from other state Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) and create a workbook to guide responses.

In terms of responding to families, the suggestion is to express gratitude for sharing their story and information, clarify that the CRP's focus is on systemic recommendations, and explain that they won't be able to provide specific updates. Families can be directed towards advocacy organizations or resources like RISE and HEARS line for further support and information.

Roundtable Discussion

The discussion revolved around the timing and structure of a roundtable. Two topic options were presented for the roundtable, with the structure still undecided. She emphasized that a roundtable would bring their issues to public attention. There was a suggestion of collaborating with the Schuyler Center in some capacity, but the topic needed to be clearly defined. The pros of a public roundtable include increased visibility, but it also opens the discussion to more opinions.

Panel members favored focusing on legislation as it might be more achievable compared to broader implementation. There was strong support for mandated reporter legislation, but details such as when, where, and how the roundtable would take place and whether a child welfare coalition would join needed further consideration. Another highlight was placed on the immediate challenges faced by new professionals in the field, with a suggestion of inviting individuals who are mandated reporters with limited real-life experience. This perspective could shed light on the difficulties they encounter and the need for a change in mindset over the long term. Mrs. Chesna also pointed out that while some may need a more forceful approach to change, others may resist change altogether, which is an important consideration.

WRI Updates

In the upcoming panel meetings, two significant guest speakers are scheduled to participate. Paul Brady, the Executive Director of NYPWA, will be joining the Western Panel meeting on September 20th at 10:00 a.m. Additionally, the Director of the Bureau of Research from OCFS will be taking part in the NYC Panel meeting on September 21st at 4:00 p.m. These guest speakers are expected to provide valuable insights and updates during their respective meetings.

Meeting Adjourned: 2:45 p.m.

Next CRP Meetings:

- Joint Panels Meeting: October 10 | Time **TBD**