



Department of Children and Families

Report of the
New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect
THIRD ANNUAL REPORT



Proceedings and Findings for the period of July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013

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Introduction

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (Task Force) is a statutorily established, multi-disciplinary advisory body to New Jersey's child welfare system. The Task Force also serves as New Jersey's Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force and the designated entity that entitles it to receive and administer CJA funds.

The purpose of the Task Force, in accordance with the statute, is to study and develop recommendations regarding the most effective means of improving the quality and scope of child protective and preventative services provided or supported by State government. This includes a review of the practices and policies utilized by the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), formerly the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), and Division of Family and Community Partnerships (DFCP), formerly the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in order to:

- (1) optimize coordination of child abuse related services and investigations;
- (2) promote the safety of children at risk of abuse or neglect;
- (3) ensure a timely determination with regard to reports of alleged child abuse;
- (4) educate the public about the problems of, and coordinate activities relating to, child abuse and neglect;
- (5) develop a Statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect and mechanisms to facilitate child abuse and neglect prevention strategies in coordination with the Division of Family and Community Partnerships;
- (6) mobilize citizens and community agencies in a proactive effort to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect; and
- (7) foster cooperative working relationships between State and local agencies responsible for providing services to victims of child abuse and neglect and their families.

The Task Force is also designated as one of DCF's federally mandated Citizen Review Panels.

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides CJA grants that are used to develop programs to reform state systems and improve New Jersey's response to cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and suspected cases of child abuse and neglect fatalities.

CJA funds are also used to establish and support programs to improve New Jersey's child protection system in a manner that limits additional trauma to child victims of abuse and neglect. In accordance with the Task Force Three-Year Assessment, model programs and innovative approaches were implemented to improve the identification, investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect, as well as enhance the effectiveness of the judicial process.

In February 2013, the Task Force, in collaboration with DCF, distributed a request for information to DCF's lead Domestic Violence agencies to solicit innovative approaches to respond to the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect. This initiative specifically required that the DCF's DCP&P be included in the planning and implementation of this project as the target audience.

Children's Trust Fund

The New Jersey Children's Trust Fund (CTF) is a private/public partnership created by law in 1985 to fund child abuse and neglect prevention programs in New Jersey communities. Funds come to the CTF primarily from residents, through the NJ state income tax check-off. Private donors also make contributions.

The CTF supports local child abuse and neglect prevention programs that implement evidence-based and evidence-informed programs. The funding priority for the current funding cycle (through 6/30/14), established by the Task Force, is to promote positive parent-child attachment and support infant and early childhood mental health programs. Grants were awarded in 2011 through a competitive process and recipients were funded for a three-year cycle. These projects are overseen by DCF's, DFCP, Office of Early Childhood Services. The following is a list of the award recipients and a summary of their projects:

Incredible Parents! Incredible Kids! - This is a research based prevention program targeting children and their parents run by Family Connections Inc. It serves approximately 50-55 children and parents in Newark and Essex County. Core performance outcomes include the following:

- Children will demonstrate an increase in positive social skills as measured by the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Subscale social skills composite score.
- Parents of preschoolers, toddlers and babies will indicate confidence in managing current child behavior in the home, on their own, to be measured by Parent Questionnaire.

Positive Parenting-Padres Positivos – Positive Parenting-Padres Positivos targets at-risk, low income Spanish and English speaking immigrant Latino and refugee parents with preschool children from ages two-and-a-half to five. This program is run by the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Mercer County and serves approximately 65-75 parents and 149 children annually. Core performance outcomes include an increase in:

- family functioning; and
- nurturing and attachment

Triple P-Positive Parenting Program – This program is run by South Jersey Healthcare and targets Cumberland County, specifically the cities of Bridgeton, Millville and Vineland and serves approximately 85-100 parents annually. Core performance outcomes include:

- decrease in child's conduct problems
- increase in child's social behavior

Task Force Proceedings

The Task Force meets bi-monthly. These meetings provide the Task Force with the opportunity to discuss and assess items associated with its statutorily mandated work. Supporting the work of the Task Force are four committees and one subcommittee, which meet bi-monthly and report the results of their activities to the Task Force. There are approximately 80 individuals that contribute to this important work. To view a copy of the meeting minutes, please visit www.njtaskforcecan.org

Summary of Activities – 2012 to 2013

Each year, the Task Force sponsors multidisciplinary training programs to improve the handling of cases of child abuse and neglect. All Task Force-sponsored professional training programs are child-focused and designed to promote skills that prevent additional trauma to child victims and their families.

CJA funds were used to support the following professional development projects to enhance the knowledge of persons involved in the investigation, prosecution, assessment and treatment of child abuse and neglect:

- A. **Finding Words New Jersey: Forensic Interviewing & Preparing Children for Court** - The goal of this project is to train frontline professionals involved in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse to conduct an effective and legally defensible interview of alleged child sexual abuse victims of various ages and prepare children for court. The Finding Words - NJ child-focused forensic interviewing project continues to reform the investigation and prosecution process and improve civil and criminal court proceedings.

- B. **Conferences** - On September 21, 2012, the Task Force, in collaboration with DCF, hosted a full-day statewide multidisciplinary skill building conference for nearly 250 child protection professionals. The conference, entitled “The Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence

and Child Abuse and Neglect and the Impact on Children”, featured a half-day presentation by

Dr. Evan Stark, Professor Emeritus, Public Affairs/Public Health at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The afternoon session, which was facilitated by Dr. Stark, featured a panel of experts from child welfare, mental health, social work, domestic violence and the courts. This discussion addressed roles and responsibilities, current needs and next steps in the field.

To date, over
1,000 professionals
involved in
investigating child
sexual abuse
have been trained
in Finding
Words-NJ

Conference - September 21, 2012

The Co-Occurrence of Domestic
Violence and Child Abuse/Neglect
and the Impact on Children

- Keynote

Dr. Evan Stark, Ph.D., M.S.W.
Pines Manor
Edison, NJ

The Task Force is currently preparing for its Biennial Conference on Friday, September 20, 2013, entitled “Transitions: From Infancy to Adulthood.”

Conference - September 20, 2013

Transitions: From Infancy to Adulthood
Atlantic City, New Jersey

- C. **Multidisciplinary (MDT) Team Training** - CJA funds are provided to the MDT Coordinators’ Association for training to improve case management of the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases referred to the prosecutor’s office. This year’s conference, entitled “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children –A Training for Child Abuse Professionals” was held on June 6, 2013. Also in June, approximately 50 MDT coordinators participated in a leadership/skill building training, entitled “Developing Leadership and Facilitation Skills and Developing the MDT Process.”

Work of the Task Force Committees

Prevention Committee

The Prevention Committee of the Task Force coordinates the efforts of stakeholders with expertise in and commitment to family support and prevention to ensure development and effective implementation of a meaningful and effective New Jersey Statewide Prevention Plan.

Accomplishments for the past year include:

- Maintaining two-way communication between the Prevention Committee and the full Task Force. This has been accomplished by reports on the work and activities of the Prevention Committee at each Task Force meeting and a presentation to the full Task Force by the NJ Partnership to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse on Improving the Quality and Access to Data about Child Sexual Abuse.
- Reviewing and revising “The Standards for Prevention: Building Success Through Family Support.” The current standards have all been reviewed and proposed revisions written.
- Developing a new evaluation rubric for the Standards for Prevention, which provides more objective assessment of the standards. Pending further review by the Prevention Committee, the standards will be submitted to the full Task Force for final approval.

A priority for the upcoming year is to revise the NJ Statewide Prevention Plan, entitled “New Jersey Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan, A Roadmap to Child and Family Well-being”, in collaboration with DCF and together with community input.

Prevention Committee Recommendation to the Department of Children and Families

The Prevention Committee recommends that measurable outcomes and evaluations be an integral component of all programs and services in DFCP.

Protection Committee

The goal of the Protection Committee of the Task Force is to coordinate the efforts of stakeholders with expertise in and commitment to advancing the interests of children in the criminal and civil justice systems, in order to address issues of child protection and systemic improvement.

Over the past year, this committee formed two new workgroups (in addition to the Batterers Accountability Workgroup) to move its work forward:

- the Human Trafficking Workgroup, which will explore a multidisciplinary approach for best practice guidelines for child victims of human trafficking and how to best address victims' needs; and
- the Data Collection Workgroup, which will look at various data sources and how each entity defines sexual and physical abuse and then compare definitions.

Communication Committee

The mission of the Communication Committee is to increase awareness and promote social change related to child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention for the public and for professionals. It is also to promote awareness of the Task Force's activities and issues.

The committee was re-established in July 2012. Major activities for 2012-2013 included:

- recruiting and assembling members;
- developing a mission statement, goals and objectives; and
- establishing the scope and responsibility of the committee relative to the Task Force and the other committees.

Accomplishments for the past year include:

- creating a media plan that includes website rebranding, periodic e-news, the Task Force Annual Report, and a Task Force Calendar;
- developing a working relationship with the DCF staff responsible for public affairs and communication; and
- producing a plan for member recruitment, including outreach to university marketing and communication programs.

Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS)

The SORS is charged by legislation with oversight of two critical areas:

1. staffing issues within DCP&P, including staffing levels, caseload size, staff recruitment, training and retention; and
2. outcomes for children and families.

SORS is also required to submit an annual report directly to the NJ Legislature on the work it does around staffing and outcomes. To view this report, please visit www.njtaskforcecan.org.

Some activities and accomplishments for 2012-2013 include:

- **Examining implementation of the Educational Stability Act** - Data on implementation of the act was presented to the SORS in July 2012 and a subsequent discussion is planned later in 2013. The SORS members raised several issues about consequences, both intended and unintended, of the act that they wished to examine further.
- **Prioritizing parent/child and sibling visitation as a critical practice issue in need of improvement** - The SORS has been interested in parent/child visitation as a result of the federal monitor's reports identifying this as an area in which DCP&P has not yet met its targeted benchmark. The committee analyzed the data from the monitor's reports from 2009 and requested information about DCP&P's plans to improve this area. This was presented to the SORS at its March 2013 meeting. Further, the SORS has requested data about therapeutic and supervised visitation programs funded by DCP&P to determine the accessibility and availability of such programs. This information has not yet been received.

Some priority areas of analysis for the SORS in the upcoming year are:

- parent/child and sibling visitation; and
- services, particularly those that support parent/child and sibling visitation

Task Force Committees/Subcommittee Membership

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