

NEW JERSEY

Child Welfare Citizen Review Panel



Annual Report
AUGUST 2009

NEW JERSEY CHILD WELFARE CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

MEMBERSHIP

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Linda Porcaro.....Somerset County Youth Services

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MEMBERSHIP

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Public Defender

Lynn Forbes.....Advocate

Shantel Garner.....Foster & Adoptive Family Services/NJ Foster
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Jody Layton, M.S.....Certified Trauma and Loss Specialist

Catherine Lindenbaum.....New Jersey Parent Teacher Association

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Maria McGowan.....New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate

Mary McManus-Smith, Esq.....Legal Services of New Jersey

Gary Mitchell, Esq.....Office of Parental Representation

Leslie Malkin.....New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women

Kathleen Roe, MA.....Parents Anonymous of NJ, Inc.

Jonathan Sabin, LSW.....N.J. Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

Sharon Surette, MSW, LSW.....N.J. Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

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NJCWCRP COORDINATOR

Michele Safrin, MSW.....Department of Children and Families

MISSION

The mission of the New Jersey Child Welfare Citizen Review Panel (NJCWCRP) is to improve the safety, well being and permanency of NJ children by examining the practices, policies and procedures of State and local agencies; and to evaluate the extent to which they are effectively meeting their child protection responsibilities.

The mission is accomplished through building a constituency for child welfare and soliciting public comments to assess the impact of the policies and practices of the State child welfare system upon children and families. The Panel shall issue an annual report of its findings and recommendations to the State for improvements in the NJ child welfare system.

Each year the NJCWCRP identifies elements of the child protection system that may impede the delivery of necessary services for the children and families served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and its divisions. The aim is to ultimately affect positive outcomes for those children and families. Through survey, public testimony, individual and collaborative research by panel members, the NJCWCRP has focused on child abuse reporting and screening policies and procedures, the needs of children in out of home placements (resource, group and treatment homes, residential treatment facilities), the educational needs of children under the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) supervision, adolescents exiting state supported living arrangements, and kinship care (relatives caring for children).



HISTORY

The New Jersey Comprehensive Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CCAPTA), the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and its subsequent amendments require that each State establish a minimum of three Citizen Review Panels to evaluate the extent to which the State is effectively fulfilling its child protection responsibilities. The NJCWCRP serves as one of New Jersey's three Citizen Review Panels. Operational since 1999 under the auspices of the NJ Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Panel became independent in 2006. The Federal and State laws mandate that the Citizen Review Panels be composed of volunteer members who are broadly representative of the community, as well as members with expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.



MEMBERSHIP

The NJCWCRP's membership is sensitive to cultural, ethnic, and economic diversity; and strives to broadly represent the community at-large, which includes concerned citizens and experts in child protection and prevention, advocacy, foster care, the court system, and children services.

While receiving financial and administrative support from the Department of Children and Families (DCF); the NJCWCRP operates independently of DCF. The panel maintains autonomy in selecting membership and leadership, determining investigative direction, and monitoring DCF without interference. The NJCWCRP encourages individuals who are dedicated to improving New Jersey's child protection system to apply by calling 609-777-4536.

SUMMARY OF PANEL ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Continued to monitor the development of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Education for the purpose of collaboratively meeting the education needs of children in out of home placements.
- ▶ With the input of Professor Robert Reid of Montclair State University, the NJCWCRP Subcommittee on Children Aging Out of State Care completed development of aging out youth and stakeholder surveys which, with approval of the panel, were then distributed and administered for the purpose of data collection and eventual trend assessment summary with recommendations for statewide activity and awareness.
- ▶ Engaged in a strategic planning process facilitated by the National Citizen Review Panel consultant, Blake Jones, Ph.D and identified Differential Response and Children Aging Out of State Care as the areas for focus in FY 2009.
- ▶ Assessed the membership needs of the Panel to ensure statewide representation and diversity of membership which resulted in the addition of new Panel members bringing membership to 20 members.
- ▶ Participated in the Child & Family Services Review (CFSR) to represent the work of the Panel as an oversight body and to represent the role of the Panel in the state system of care.



MONITORING THE DOE AND DCF MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

The NJCWCRP continued to monitor the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families. This MOA seeks to improve inter-systems communication regarding child abuse/neglect reporting and response procedures for both Departments; develops a realistic and user friendly standardized training curriculum for all school personnel; and promotes academic success of children under DYFS supervision in out-of-home care by raising awareness and accountability for the children's emotional and educational needs.

As currently articulated, the draft MOA delineates action steps that would establish a framework for promoting interagency collaboration and communication to support educational stability and continuity for children in out of home care. The draft MOA is designed to serve multiple purposes as a manual, tool kit and training document. To that end, five goals have been established that detail action steps to be taken. The action steps are structured to ensure collaboration and oversight of the implementation of the Goals and Objectives; they are; 1) the training of school personnel on identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect as well as the review of available school data, 2) periodic case reviews, 3) feedback forums with school district and DCF staff, 4) state-wide meeting of county entities facilitating local collaboration and 5) cross system problem resolution strategies.

In addition to the Memorandum of Agreement, the multidisciplinary workgroup developed a Best Practices Manual and a staff development training instrument (Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation) and piloted the presentation in two select schools in the Trenton area. The Workgroup is reviewing feedback on the presentation prior to expanding the efforts to additional schools.

The Memorandum of Agreement is currently under review by the Executive Leadership of both departments.

Recommendation:

DCF and DOE will develop an implementation plan for the child abuse identification and reporting training for school personnel and make it available for use during the 2009-2010 school year.

DCF and DOE will make the training design available to all professional training organizations and school county superintendents for the 2009-2010 school year.

DCF and DOE will provide to the Panel a concrete plan of when the MOA and Best Practices Manual will be completed, when it will be signed by the commissioners, and when the MOA and Best Practices Manual will be rolled out to the local school districts.

AGING OUT

The NJCWCRP Committee on Children Aging Out of State Care drafted two satisfaction surveys for dissemination to aging out youth and the professionals and volunteers that work with them in order to ascertain perceived service needs.

This is the first time in New Jersey that a concurrent tool has been developed and disseminated to capture the viewpoints of the youth and those that professionally guide them.

Both the youth and professional surveys focused on the following domains: relationship and resilience support; life skills and after care services both of which are directly linked to federal funding; housing; mental health services; and termination of DYFS involvement. The surveys also provided an opportunity for narrative responses.

Once the surveys were developed they were reviewed by Professor Robert Reid at Montclair State University and finalized for distribution. The professional survey was accessible via SurveyMonkey and sent to the following groups:

- ▶ Court Appointed Special Advocates, (CASA),
- ▶ Law Guardians,
- ▶ Care Management Organizations,
- ▶ Youth Case Management,
- ▶ Unified Case Management,
- ▶ Family Support Organizations,
- ▶ Youth Partnership,
- ▶ Child Placement Review Board members,
- ▶ Legal Services of NJ.

The Youth Survey was offered on-line thru SurveyMonkey and also was distributed at youth focus groups and workshops held throughout the State. The closing date for the survey is June 30, 2009. Reports will then be generated and recommendations will be issued to the Department of Children and Families.





STATE CENTRAL REGISTRY (SCR)

In response to the panel's recommendations regarding the State Central Registry (SCR) training and adequate space, the SCR administrative leadership responded that they have taken measures to address the panel's recommendations that training for new hires be provided through the Child Welfare Training Academy (CWTA). Since October 2008, the SCR and the CWTA staff have been working collaboratively to develop a SCR specific training curriculum that will be provided to SCR staff through the training academy. As the panel also recommended, SCR leadership will continue ongoing monitoring and coaching of new staff as both are integral components of the effective management of the operation. Also, experienced supervisory SCR staff will continue to provide weekly call monitoring and ongoing feedback to screeners to support staff development and ensure consistent and appropriate screening decisions.

The panel also recommended that SCR explore utilization of space that affords continuity of operation. The panel identified that the space allocated to SCR was insufficient and might contribute to worker stress, as workers were sharing desks and the operation is located on separate floors. In June 2009, the Panel was informed that the New Jersey Department of Treasury approved additional operational space to be utilized by SCR which now allows for the entire operation to be located on the same floor. This additional space now affords each screener and supervisor individual dedicated work space and provides a more appropriate environment for effective management and worker capacity in their roles.

DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE (DR)

The Differential Response (DR) Initiative is operational, providing services to families in six counties; Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties since September 2007, and Middlesex and Union counties since March 2008.

The DR Initiative was launched to make services and support available to families absent an allegation of child abuse and neglect and to limit unnecessary government intervention in family life. These reports, commonly referred to as child welfare concerns, do not warrant an abuse or neglect investigation, rather these families are engaged in a full assessment to determine what services are needed to strengthen and restore family stability. These calls are typically from families, or on behalf of families, experiencing a range of challenges or stressful conditions that affect family stability, and may be positively addressed through a well-coordinated community-based support system.

During the past two decades, Differential Response systems have been implemented in more than two dozen States across the country. Many states, including New Jersey have developed Differential Response pilot sites and are slowly moving toward expansion and statewide implementation.

The concept of Differential Response is an important one in the field of child welfare and child protection. The reasons for implementing Differential Response are numerous and include the following:

- ▶ Allows child protection agencies to focus child protection resources on cases where abuse/neglect has occurred or is suspected.
- ▶ Differential Response assists families who might be otherwise screened out or deemed lower risk by a child protection agency to receive needed services. Nationally, less than 30 percent of reports of suspected child maltreatment result in substantiation of abuse or neglect, and even fewer are opened for ongoing services.¹
- ▶ Differential Response allows for a less adversarial relationship and less barriers between a DR provider agency and a family. Parents and caregivers, understandably view child protection investigations as threatening and negative. Differential Response permits a family to receive needed services absent the perception of a threat to their family stability or parenting ability.
- ▶ Although immediate safety issues are usually resolved before a child protection case is closed, often, the underlying causes for those threats to safety frequently are not. As a result, many families experience subsequent maltreatment reports while their problems, stresses, and issues remain unresolved.²

1 Child Information Getaway, 2008 http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/differential_response/differential_responseb.cfm

2 IBID

- ▶ Child welfare agencies have grown to recognize the importance of family-centered practices and family engagement to achieve better outcomes for the child and family. Differential Response initiatives allow the agency provider to work closely with the family, identify and build on family strengths, bring about needed change and involve the community and extended family supports to protect children and produce stronger and more positive outcomes.

The Panel believes that the DR initiative is a critically important program that provides for and protects the children of New Jersey. The lessons learned and outcomes of this initiative will assist in determining the future direction of the state in providing services to families and children. The Panel believes that monitoring the DR initiative, and assessing the program's data and outcomes is in accordance with its mandate to examine the practices, policies and procedures of State and local agencies; and to evaluate the extent to which they are effectively meeting their child protection responsibilities.

In addition to the lack of shared data and identification of clear outcome measures the Panel was also inhibited in its efforts to examine the DR initiative because the Differential Response Steering Committee discontinued meeting in the Fall of 2008 and that initial data was also not made available to the Panel.

In October 2008, the panel met with the Director of the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships who oversees the DR initiative. Although the director provided an excellent overview of the organization, the panel was informed that no data was available.

On June 3, 2009 the panel met with the Interim Director of the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships and was informed that DCF was not prepared to release data for review. The interim director reported that DCF has a data plan developed in conjunction with the *Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA)*, that guides the management and flow of information. DCF provided limited data to the panel; however, it was insufficient to support the breadth of review envisioned.

The panel will continue efforts to obtain Differential Response outcome data.

DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE (DR)

Recommendations:

- ▶ DCF should reconvene the Differential Response steering committee to provide oversight, community expertise and stakeholder input as the two new differential response sites are rolled out.
- ▶ DCF should make data regarding the Differential Response initiatives available on a quarterly basis to community stakeholders about specific outcomes being sought, trending being tracked, and data that is being gathered to assess DR operational success. The data should communicate:
 - ① What will be considered success in funded Differential Response programs?
 - ② What baseline outcome data is being sought and will be used to identify this success?
 - ③ What the timeline is to produce information about outcomes?
 - ④ What did the programs granted DR funding and operating with DCF contracts, identify as the explicit outcomes and positive changes that would occur because of their Differential Response activities as proposed in their funded awards.





FUTURE DIRECTION

- ▶ Analyze data generated from the aging out youth and stakeholder surveys and issue a report with recommendations to the Department of Children and Families.
- ▶ Request information regarding which Division of Youth and Family Services local offices have adolescent specialty units or adolescent specialists, whether there is any criteria as to which adolescents are being served, and if there has been any assessment of the impact of having specialized adolescent units or caseloads.
- ▶ Obtain Differential Response data to examine progress of the Differential Response initiatives.
- ▶ Begin to review the information and data that is included in the Federal Monitor's reports to identify focus areas for the coming year.
- ▶ Continue to monitor the Department of Education-Department of Children and Families Memorandum of Agreement and affiliated documents.
- ▶ Continue to monitor the State Central Registry.
- ▶ Review the state's 2009-2010 CAPTA Plan.

NJCWCRP MEETING DATES - 2009/2010

Meetings are held at:
NJ State House Annex, Committee Room 1
Trenton, NJ
9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

September 2, 2009	February 3, 2010
October 7, 2009	March 3, 2010
November 4, 2009	April 7, 2010
December 2, 2009	May 5, 2010
January 6, 2010	June 2, 2010

For more information, visit us at:

<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/commissions/citizens/>

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