

2013 NEW YORK STATE CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The direct and indirect costs resulting from our country's failure to prevent children's maltreatment have been estimated at \$104 billion a year. The weight on New York's economy, taxpayers, and businesses is excessive, and it is a strong reason to place a higher priority on the prevention of abuse and neglect of the state's future workforce. As abused kids grow up and become adults, the costs to society, employers and taxpayers continue to mount. States can do much to support the safety and healthy development of children. The research on the prevention of child abuse and neglect provides a clear pathway to the prevention of child maltreatment through policies that nurture children, strengthen families, and build caring and responsive communities.



2013 RECOMMENDATIONS

ESSENTIAL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Restore open-ended funding for preventive, protective, adoption, aftercare, and independent living services to the full 65% state share as called for in New York State statute.

Uncapped preventive funding is the core component of the State's strategy to reduce foster care placements, by increasing services to families in their communities and homes, strengthening and supporting their ability to care for their children.

Local districts have lost ground since the 2007-08 budget, when the state share of funding for services was cut from 65% to 62%, imposing an increased burden on local taxpayers. More services are needed to address the root causes of child maltreatment—social isolation, poverty, substance abuse, maternal depression, domestic violence and lack of parenting skills and to help and support families who care for a child scarred by maltreatment, if we wish to prevent re-entry.

The expectations on the child welfare system are enormous, and adequate resources are required if the system is to reach those expectations. Restoring funding to the 65% state share called for in State statute would be a first step toward the Panels' aspiration goal of returning funding for these essential services to a 75% state share.

FAMILY ASSESSMENT RESPONSE (FAR)

Continue to support implementation of FAR throughout New York State, by providing the necessary training, coaching and flexible funding needed to meet individual family needs.

Conduct an evaluation of FAR incorporating a broader representation of counties utilizing an approach that includes a cost/benefit analysis.

FAR is a child protective services (CPS) response which is used for low- or moderate-risk reports accepted by the SCR. Offering FAR allows county departments of social services to strategically dedicate staff time and investigation resources to reports where court involvement may be necessary to protect children. FAR engages family members to identify needs and solutions and helps them access services.

FAR has grown from the initial six pilot counties in 2008 to 25 counties in 2013. New York City began implementation of FAR in January 2013 and has already expanded its practice within Queens. In addition, counties offering FAR have deepened their commitment to the practice by adding staff and categories of reports for which a FAR approach can be assigned. Families assigned to FAR are less likely to have a petition filed in Family Court and FAR reduces placements into foster care. Importantly, children are just as safe with the FAR approach as with the investigative approach.

Panel members urge OCFS to continue its long-standing support for FAR and to encourage and allow more counties to offer the response. Further, the panels encourage OCFS to conduct a broader evaluation of FAR in New York State that incorporates additional counties beyond those in the original pilot and allows for a cost-benefit analysis to include improved outcomes for children and families, children's safety, use of services and cost-savings.

RACIAL EQUITY

Continue to address and seek to eliminate racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities by expanding OCFS's work to additional counties through the use of data-informed and data-driven strategies.

Recruit more racially and ethnically diverse and bi-lingual staff to child welfare.

Require continuous staff development and education advancing cultural competence and responsiveness in child welfare.

Panel members reiterate their recommendations to achieve racial equity in child welfare policies, procedures and practices, as noted in the Panels' 2012 Annual Report. In 2009, OCFS initiated a pilot project in six counties to address high rates of disproportionality and disparities that is now operating in twelve select counties. Strategies used by the pilot counties vary but usually include training in cultural competence, using data to identify where disparities exist, implementing FAR in low-income communities, and locating services to increase access in communities of need. The work is complex and difficult and is critically important if the system is to achieve fair outcomes. It has yet to achieve its goal of reductions in disparities. While this work has included outreach to numerous community partners including the courts, panel members encourage outreach to various mandated reporters including law enforcement, health care professionals including hospital staff, and school district personnel.

Panel members encourage deeper examination of the system as a whole as well as within local districts of social services.

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS

Restore funding for Healthy Families NY to \$26.8 million, an increase of \$3.5 million.

Provide \$5 million in funding to sustain The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP program), an increase of \$3 million.

Home visiting programs are evidence-based primary prevention programs aimed at new mothers and fathers at a time when they are most receptive to services. Programs improve health outcomes for babies, improve parenting skills, reduce the incidence of abuse or neglect, and increase school readiness and parental employment. These programs have suffered from lack of funding to meet the demand for services. These programs achieve cost savings through reductions in low birth-weight babies and associated medical expenses, reducing recurrence in abuse and neglect reports, and increased school performance and less need for special education.

EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

Eliminate educational neglect as a basis for child protective reports for children 13 and older.

Identify effective practices to reduce absenteeism, educate school district personnel about these practices and support the implementation of promising models in school districts throughout the state.

Address chronic absenteeism in primary and elementary schools where research shows the most promising results.

Since 2010, panel members have urged a change in statute for situations involving teens who choose not to attend school but whose parents are reported to the SCR for educational neglect only. A CPS response is simply not effective in such circumstances and represents an inappropriate use of child protective resources. School district and child welfare personnel, including the State Department of Education and OCFS, should work in collaboration to identify promising practices and to support their implementation.

Panel members also call on school districts to address chronic absenteeism in the primary and elementary grades before children fall behind in school. In addition, poor attendance in 6th grade is one of the indicators, along with misbehavior and course failure, that can predict 60% of the students who will not graduate from high school.

Addressing attendance and truancy will enhance the Governor's education goal of increased graduation rates.

KINSHIP CAREGIVER SERVICES AND KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Restore funding for Kinship Caregiver Services and the Kinship Navigator Program to \$3 million.

Fund Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) as an uncapped permanency option with no reduction to the Foster Care Block Grant.

Two programs administered by OCFS are available to kin taking care of children when parents can no longer do so: Kinship Caregiver Programs and Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP). Kinship Caregiver Programs are available to family members taking care of children outside the child welfare system. Programs commonly provide peer support, assistance with services, activities and other resources. Approximately 153,000 children are in kinship care in New York. There were once 21 multi-county programs; now eight programs remain covering 11 counties with little funding.

KinGAP is available to relatives caring for kin in approved or certified foster care homes, when adoption and reunification have been ruled out. Relative foster care providers can apply for the program and leave the child welfare system and receive needed financial support. A total of 339 children entered KinGAP arrangements since its start in April, 2011.

Panel members urge appropriate funding for these programs and ask that OCFS ensure that local departments of social services fully inform family members of their placement options as required by the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act.

For more information or to view the full report, go to www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org