

**Western Citizen Review Panel
Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2014
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Attendees:

Ellen Kennedy, MSW, Chairperson
Melissa A. Cavagnaro, Esq. Lipsitz Green Scime Cambria LLP
Paula Mazur, MD, Children’s Hospital of Buffalo
Stefan Perkowski, Program Director, Child & Adolescent Treatment Services
Sarlyn Tate, Social Worker, Buffalo Psychiatric Center
Dennis Walczyk, CEO, Catholic Charities of Buffalo

Guests:

Lisa Gordon, OCFS (by phone)
Dawn Scott, OCFS
Chris Cargain, OCFS (by phone)
Grace Thompson, OCFS (by phone)

WRI Staff:

Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director

Handouts

- Agenda
- Western CRP Meeting Minutes from September 5, 2014
- Joint Panels’ Meeting Minutes from October 2, 2014
- NYS CRP Proposed 2015 Meeting Dates
- Child Welfare Practice Model
- Child Protective Services Program Manual, June 2009
 - Table of Contents
 - Chapter IV: Local District Child Protective Services
- Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum, October 23, 2014: “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act”
- NYS Office of Children and Family Services Local Commissioners: “SFY 2014-15 Enhanced CPS Funds”
- Child Protective Services Program Manual, December 2006
- Handouts Provided by Dawn Scott from OCFS:
 - “Defining Risk” from the Safety/Risk Assessment Refresher
 - “Defining Safety and Risk” from the Safety and Risk Refresher for Child Welfare Professionals
 - Laminated Safety and Risk Pocket Guides for Caseworkers

WELCOME (Ellen Kennedy)

The Panel Chair called the meeting to order, reviewed the agenda with participants, and conducted a round of introductions.

OVERVIEW OF SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENTS IN CPS (Dawn Scott, OCFS Buffalo Regional Office)

Ms. Scott provided an overview of the safety and risk assessments caseworkers and supervisors conduct with families. Local districts have 24 hours to initiate a child protective services (CPS) investigation and 60 days to complete it. Caseworkers must conduct an immediate assessment of the safety of the children named in report and all other children in the household.

A child is considered “safe” when there is no immediate or impending danger of serious harm to a child’s life or health, as a result of acts of commission or omission (actions or inactions) by the child’s parent(s) or caretaker(s). The caseworker assesses 18 possible safety factors to make this assessment. If a child is assessed to be unsafe, the caseworker must develop a safety plan with interventions sufficient to protect the child from harm. Whenever possible, the caseworker asks the family to participate in the development of the safety plan.

While safety focuses on the present, the assessment of risk involves the likelihood that a child may be abused or maltreated in the future. The Risk Assessment Profile (RAP) is OCFS’ evidence-informed, structured decision making tool that is incorporated into the CONNECTIONS computer case management system. The caseworker assesses 15 possible risk elements and, after entering the data into the computer system, a case risk rating is determined, ranging from “low” to “very high” risk. Referrals for services are made based on the case risk rating as well as the strengths and needs of the family. Statistically, overall only a small percentage of CPS cases involve removal of the children from their homes. A risk assessment is also done prior to closing a CPS case open for services.

There are several “elevated risk elements” which, if present in the family, automatically override the case risk rating and make it “very high.” These include: death of a child due to abuse or maltreatment, a previous termination of parental rights, sibling removed from home because of prior abuse or neglect, repeated incidents of sexual abuse or severe physical abuse, sexual abuse and the perpetrator is likely to have access to the child, physical injury to a child under the age of one due to abuse or maltreatment, serious physical injury requiring hospitalization/emergency care within prior six months due to abuse or maltreatment, or a newborn child has positive toxicology for alcohol or drugs.

OCFS UPDATES (OCFS, Lisa Gordon by phone)

Ms. Gordon distributed a draft Child Welfare Practice Model under development by OCFS. OCFS is working with a national consultant and sought stakeholders’ input. This provides a road-map for OCFS and the field to help align resources, policies, etc. The purpose of the Practice Model is to provide a consistent and recognizable approach to child welfare practice across New York State.

KEYS Supervision Initiative (CDHS – Grace Thompson, Project Coordinator of KEYS)

The KEYS Model of Supervision is an important organizational development model and support system for local district supervisors. It is a model for the 21st century workforce that is more responsive to teamwork than taking orders. This model supports supervisors in their role of helping staff develop

their skills through support and education. The focus is on modeling behavior and practicing and receiving feedback.

Six counties have implemented KEYS to date and OCFS is pleased with the results. Four more counties will implement KEYS in 2015. Implementation involves a year-long organizational development process that implements the KEYS model of supervision with leadership support from a Local Implementation Team (LIT). The LIT includes staff from all levels, from administrative to clerical support, to strengthen teamwork, partnerships and shared values about the agency's mission.

There was a discussion about where KEYS is being implemented. In the western part of the state, this includes Monroe and Alleghany counties.

Unaccompanied Minors (OCFS, Chris Cargain)

The UAC program is designed to provide for the care and placement of unaccompanied refugee minors who are apprehended in the United States and are taken into care pending resolution of their claims for relief under U.S. immigration law or release to adult family members or responsible guardians.

Since January 2014, 100,000 unaccompanied refugee children have crossed the border mainly from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The minor has no lawful immigration status, is under the age of 18 and has no parent present. The minor population consists of adolescents 12-17 years of age and the highest percentage represented by males. These unaccompanied refugee children are in the legal custody of the federal government. OCFS certifies nearly 1,000 beds in voluntary agencies, located primarily downstate and on Long Island.

The length of stay in ORR custody is between 30-35 days, but it can vary. There have been over 6,000 unaccompanied minors that have been discharged to sponsors in New York (2/3 reside in Nassau and Suffolk Counties). Temporary custody, health and education services have to be provided. Ninety two percent of the transfers to sponsors are with immediate family members. The issue with downstate is enrollment in public schools. DOE issued guidance document that schools have to enroll these children.

OCFS is currently waiting for approval of a \$360 million RFP award by the federal government, including sites in New York State. The results are expected within the next couple of weeks.

FOLLOW-UP TO 10/2 JOINT PANEL MEETING (Ellen Kennedy, Lee Lounsbury)

- Status of Annual Report (Lee Lounsbury) – The comments on the draft Annual Report are due to WRI by November 19. Some feedback has been received, primarily language clarification.
- Prospective new Panel Members – there was a discussion concerning potential new Panel members. Ms. Kennedy and Ms. Lounsbury will follow up with several potential prospects.
- Legislation Regarding Caseload Sizes - Ms. Lounsbury clarified that the legislation mentioned at the Joint Panel Meeting in October regarding caps on case load size in NYS did not pass both houses of the legislature and was therefore not sent to the Governor for signature.

PLANNING FOR 2015

- Review of Proposed Meeting Dates (handout): There was discussion about whether the Panel wanted to meet three or four times per year, in addition to the two joint Panel meetings. The decision was to meet four times per year, plus the two joint panel meetings. With some adjustments, dates were set for the upcoming 2015 meetings.
- Impact Assessment: There was a discussion of options about how to approach the impact assessment the Panels agreed to conduct during 2015. The group agreed that a small committee of about two people from each of the Panels could structure the approach, and provide an overview to Panel Chairs and at the joint Panel meeting in the spring.

WRAP UP AND AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

The Panel agreed to invite Erie Co. Commissioner Dankert-Maurer to the March meeting to provide an update on child protective services' work. In addition, WRI will prepare the data about OCFS' measures regarding timeliness of CPS investigations and related data. The Panel is interested in hearing from Allegheny or Monroe Counties about implementation of the KEYS model of supervision.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.