

**Western Citizens Review Panel
Meeting Summary
May 13, 2016
9:00 a.m.-12 noon**

Attendees:

Panel Members: Ellen Kennedy
Stephan Perkowski
Melissa Cavagnaro
Sarlyn Tate
Dennis Walczyk
Karl Wiggins

Guests: Rae Glaser, Kinship Care Navigator Program
Maria Lauria, Nassau County Department of Social Services, Director of Children's Services (by phone)
Jeanette Feingold, Nassau County Department of Social Services, Director of Child Protective Services (by phone)
Lisa Gordon, OCFS
Al Dirschberger, PhD, Commissioner of the Erie County Department of Social Services
Aaron Kutes, Social Work Intern

WRI Staff: Judy Stanger, Program Specialist and Citizen Review Panel Coordinator
Cindy Alois, Administrative Support Specialist (by phone)

Handouts:

- Agenda
- March 11, 2016 Western CRP Meeting Summary
- MSNBC & Associated Press Article: "Painkiller sales soar around US, Fuel Addiction"
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) & Students in Foster Care
- A Shared Sentence: the devastating toll of parental incarceration on kids, families and communities, April 2016 Policy Report Kids Count, The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- OCFS Informational Letter, March 24, 2015 Re: Ashley's Law Relating to Notification of Rules and Regulations of Correctional Facilities Concerning Visitors
- OCFS Local Commissioners Memorandum Re: Phillips v. Orange County— Considerations for Child Protective Investigations
- OCFS Administrative Directive Re: Sharing Child Protective Services Information with Law Enforcement When a Child is Missing

WELCOME (Ellen Kennedy, Panel Chair)

Ms. Kennedy opened the meeting and introductions took place.

AGENDA ITEM: Kinship Care Navigator Program

Rae Glaser

Ms. Glaser, Kinship Navigator Program Manager, introduced the Kinship Navigator Program, which is funded by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) with an annual budget of \$200,000. It is an information, referral, and advocacy program for kinship caregivers, with 16 counties funded in New York State. The program provides services to 4,000 caregivers a year; there are 160,000 caregivers in New York at a time. The program is structured regionally, and Ms. Glaser's region is the Western region.

The Navigator operates a hotline that provides callers with a needs assessment and determination of what local services are available to meet their needs, including legal and financial assistance. Their chief role is to connect caregivers with resources and help them to navigate through the Department of Social Services (DSS) system. Navigators also serve as advocates for caregivers providing services such as school enrollment and medical care. These services are hard to acquire for a child if the caregiver does not have legal status. There is a "permission of contact" form that a kinship caregiver completes in order to grant him/her legal access for critical services.

Ms. Glaser stated 50% of caregivers served are outside of the foster care system. This Navigator program has been in existence for 9 years.

AGENDA ITEM: Update on Nassau County's Blind Removals Initiative

Maria Lauria, Director of Children's Services and Jeanette Feingold, Director of CPS

Ms. Lauria began the presentation by explaining the genesis of the blind removals program, which started as a pilot in 2009. Nassau County Department of Social Services (DSS) was concerned about disproportionate minority representation among children placed in foster care.

Ms. Feingold described a committee of supervisory staff that was already meeting to review cases in which removal of children was under consideration. The only change that was made was that the caseworker and those with direct knowledge of the case removed all identifying information about a family (name, address, race, etc.) so the committee was "blind" to the race and ethnicity of a family while discussing safety and risk-related issues and making the decision whether to remove a child. As a result, the number of children removed from African American and Latino families decreased, and the number of children removed from White families remained stable. Nassau County DSS compared their data in 2013 with prior years' data and found a reduction in disproportionate removals of children of color. The practice continues to have a positive impact.

A Panel member asked about staff receptivity, and Ms. Lauria stated that they recognized that they may have introduced blind removals too quickly in order to get immediate buy-in from staff. As a result, they began discussing this practice as a standing topic at meetings, and held diversity training workshops. Staff are completely on board today.

AGENDA ITEM: OCFS Updates Related to Panels' Recommendations

Lisa Gordon, OCFS

Ms. Gordon presented updates on work OCFS is doing related to the recommendations made by the Panels in the 2015 Annual Report.

Safe Sleep Initiatives: Data indicates that a majority of child fatalities occur when children are less than one year old. OCFS is working with the NYS Department of Health and with several hospitals in Erie County to provide materials to new parents in order to teach them about safe sleep practices with infants.

There was a brief discussion regarding pediatricians' ability to relay safe sleep information to parents. OCFS suggested relaying safe sleep information during pre natal care visits and having a safe sleep video playing in the waiting room. Ms. Gordon also suggested possibly developing a phone app that could be connected to the 'Check for Baby' app currently provided by the Health Department.

Analysis of Outcome Data: OCFS has contracted with Public Catalyst to work in several counties to analyze child welfare outcome data and determine what can be done to improve outcomes.

Principles of Partnership: All OCFS child welfare staff have completed a two-day training on the Principles of Partnership, which focuses on the principles of partnering with families and application of the principles.

Training Redesign: OCFS established a Steering Committee with representatives from counties to redesign the child welfare training system. The committee has been active for six months.

Healthy Families NY Home Visiting Program: OCFS received additional funds to expand this program, which is a voluntary program where paraprofessionals visit with families as early as during the mother's pregnancy, through when the child turns five. Parents become involved in this program through a screening process conducted at a hospital or in a doctor's office.

AGENDA ITEM: WRI Updates

Judy Stanger, WRI

Ms. Stanger reported that she had a phone conversation with Steven Brown of "Risking Connections", a Trauma Informed Care model that has gained national recognition. He would be available to provide a phone presentation at the next Western CRP meeting in September. The Panel expressed an interest in this presentation.

Ms. Stanger will be attending the National CRP conference and will report back to panel members at the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM: Solution-Focused, Trauma-Informed Care

Erie County DSS Commissioner Al Dirschberger, Ph.D.

Commissioner Dirschberger introduced Aaron Kutes, a social work intern at Erie County Social Services who has been working with the department on the implementation of Solution Focused Trauma Informed Care.

Panel members asked Commissioner Dirschberger to provide an update on the **State of the County** before presenting on implementation of Solution-Focused, Trauma-Informed Care. Commissioner Dirschberger started as Commissioner one year ago, in March 2015. The number of current open child protective services (CPS) cases is 2,000; a significant decrease from the 3,400 open cases when he became Commissioner. The average CPS caseload is 18; the goal is to reduce caseloads to 15. There are now CPS workers co-located in all school districts in the county. These CPS workers provide consultation to the school, facilitate reporting and referrals for services. Commissioner Dirschberger held a meeting last week with the DSS attorney and legal sub-committee to look at ways to better navigate confidentiality in this work.

Commissioner Dirschberger also reported that the Department is planning to relocate out of 478 Main Street (Buffalo), and that a request for proposals for a new building will go out on Monday. The plan is to upgrade every aspect of the department from environmental conditions, to caseload size, to providing on-site day care. He is also working on increasing the salaries, providing team building, and hosting staff recognition events.

Commissioner Dirschberger then described the implementation of solution-focused, trauma-informed care across the Department. This work began last year and to date, all DSS staff have completed training, including support staff. The premise of trauma-informed care recognizes the healing power of relationships for survivors. It asserts that both client and service providers must be healthy for this healing to occur. In addition to training of staff, all relevant paperwork was revised to include a vocabulary of solution-focused, trauma-informed language.

This training initiative involved 35 groups led by specially trained staff that were called “champions”. The champions worked on marketing the training to staff throughout the department, and to infuse it into policy and procedure. Champions actively engaged front line staff with the process of revising all documentation with trauma informed promotional language. They also inserted “secret shoppers” of services to assure that all staff utilized trauma informed care with all customers/clients. Commissioner Dirschberger said that the challenge will be sustainability, and as such there will be a 3-day training called “Welcome Erie Initiative” that will be charged with improving customer service. Solution-Focused, Trauma-Informed Care will function as the platform of the training. There will be 1600 staff that will be trained over a three day period. Commissioner Dirschberger went through implementing Trauma Informed Care when he was at a voluntary agency, and believes that this is at the root of transforming the workforce. It will also be implemented in their orientation for newly hired staff.

Meeting was adjourned by the Panel Chair.