

Western Citizen Review Panel Meeting Minutes
September 5, 2014
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Panel Members/Representatives

- Ellen Kennedy, Chairperson, Buffalo State College
- Dan Sklarski, New York State Parks and Recreation, Niagara County
- Katerina P__, Administrative....
- Melissa Cavagnaro – Lipsitz Green Scime Cambria LLP
- Sarlyn Tate, Buffalo Psychiatric Center

Guests

- Tanya Krupat, Osborne Association (via phone)
- Renee Hallock, OCFS (via phone)

WRI Staff

- Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director, Welfare Research, Inc.

Handouts:

- Agenda
- Joint Panel Meeting Minutes June 13, 2014
- Western CRP Meeting Minutes May 9, 2014
- Joint Panel Meeting Outline of Discussion June 13, 2014
- Review of NYS CRP Recommendations from the Past 7 Years, Working Draft
- Western New York Citizen Review Panel Members
- Department of Education Letter to Chief State School Officers and Child Welfare Directors May 30, 2014
- National Association of Social Workers – NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare
- GAO Foster Care – HHS Needs to Improve Oversight of Fostering Connections Act Implementation - May 2014
- Heroin Epidemic Sending More Kids to Foster Care by Joe LoTempio, Press-Republican, June 22, 2014
- Number of Homeless Children Explodes in State – *Albany- Times Union*

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Kennedy. After introductions of members, Tanya Krupat made the following presentation:

1. Children of Incarcerated Parents

The Osborne Association provides an array of services across the continuum of the criminal justice system. The association coordinates direct service programs for children and conducts advocacy and policy work through the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents.

The United States incarcerates more of its population than any other country, which has created a crisis for children. Over 2 million incarcerated people are parents of minor children. Having an incarcerated parent puts children at risk, especially those in foster care. Nationally, this affects 1:9 African American children, 1:20 Latina children, and 1:57 white children.

In New York State, approximately 105,000 children have incarcerated parents. There is no state agency responsible for this population of children. State demographics of those incarcerated in the adult system have shifted over past few years. As of January 2013, there were 54,865 people incarcerated in adult prisons in New York State (96% men, 4% women). This population has been decreasing over the past few years. The majority of incarcerated women (52%) are now from upstate New York' some people are surprised to learn this.

This is an invisible issue because of the stigma associated with it. Training programs for professionals often do not address this issue, but it is a significant issue that many children are grappling with.

(Reference: Osborne Association Children of Incarcerated Parents Fact Sheet

http://www.osborneny.org/images/uploads/printMedia/Initiative%20CIP%20Stats_Fact%20Sheet.pdf).

Children of incarcerated parents often have a sense of isolation. There are few opportunities for peer support because they are told not to share this family secret. It has often been incorrectly cited that children of incarcerated parents are 7-10 times more likely to be incarcerated themselves. This has not been demonstrated, however, and the risk can be mitigated by services and support.

There is a great need for training in this area for attorneys, family court judges, and caseworkers and the opportunity to integrate this into other work that people are already doing. In the majority of cases, the parent is not incarcerated for child-related crime.

Visiting is important. The two biggest barriers to visiting is distance and the fear of taking a child to a prison. The *Stronger Together* handbook provides the "nitty gritty" of doing a visit, such as making sure to call on the morning of the visit. It also addresses the emotions surrounding a visit, how parents should handle their children's visits. The handbook can be downloaded free of charge at

<http://www.osborneny.org/programSubPage.cfm?subPageID=52>.

The distance of the prison from the family is another barrier to visiting. The decision of where a parent is incarcerated is based on factors such as security, health and mental health of the parent, and available beds. The Osborn Association is trying to have proximity to children to be one of the factors considered in the location of the incarceration. Legislation was introduced to do a pilot program and study, but it did not pass the legislature.

There is also a lot of work being done with law enforcement in protocols for children who witness their parents being arrested. A Bill of Rights has been developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated

Parents that includes the child's right to be safe, to be informed, and not be judged. A poster is available at <http://www.sfcipp.org/> .

In response to questions, Ms. Krupat said that there are trainers who can provide seminars on this subject. The Osborne Association also offers 3 one-hour webinars.

Ms. Krupat stated that a state law was passed in June 2010 (Chapter 113) that spells out the rights of parents who are incarcerated or in residential drug treatment facilities. It introduced a few new elements for working with incarcerated parents, but a lot of people are not aware of the law, including some judges. The proximity pilot program bill will be reintroduced in the State Legislature.

Resources:

- A Sesame Street toolkit about a parent being incarcerated (handbook, DVD, and coloring book). It includes interviews between children and Murray the Muppet, and is designed for children under the age of 8. It is good for children of any age. The video can be viewed online. Sesame Street is making the kit available free to social services organizations in cases of 100 through their website.
- *Prisoners are People Too* project in Niagara Falls, coordinated by Claudia Racine, is working on collaboration among government agencies.

2. OCFS Response to the 2013 Panel Report and Recommendations (Handout)

Renee Hallock, OCFS, joined this portion of the meeting by phone. She noted that the recommendations in the 2013 Panel Report did not change significantly from the year before and OCFS's response did not change significantly either. Ms. Hallock reviewed OCFS' written response with the Panels, including the following points.

Preventive Services: There was no change in the funding level for preventive services; it remains at 62%.

Family Assessment Response (FAR): FAR has been implemented in 22 counties; and OCFS is considering implementing FAR in additional counties. There is no additional funding for FAR.

Racial Equity: Thirteen counties have been identified as having the highest levels of disparities and OCFS is working with them to identify and implement changes, including increase the rate at which children are placed with relatives when they cannot remain in their own homes.

Educational Neglect: OCFS is concerned about underlying conditions of children not going to school. There is heightening awareness of this issue and a public service announcement has been prepared about the importance of children going to school.

Kinship Guardianship: Funding for the KinGAP program is part of a block grant. As of March 31, 2014, 426 children had been discharged from foster care to a KinGAP arrangement. In addition, 210 applications have been approved by the local district but have not yet been finalized by the court, and 89 applications are pending.

When asked by Panelists whether OCFS collects data about the number of children in foster care with an incarcerated parent, Ms. Hallock reported that there is an element in the CONNECTIONS system related to incarcerated parents, but it is not always completed accurately.

Ms. Hallock reported that OCFS is working on the issue of trauma and its impact on children and families, including work with consultants and staff to deliver training on the impact of trauma. This will include standardized training with foster and adoptive parents, birth parents, and relatives. The ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) work shows that trauma has lifelong impact on emotional and physical health. OCFS is exploring the use of the New York Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) instrument for earlier assessment of children and families.

OCFS is looking at the concerning issue of “re-homing” of children via social media, and in particular adopted children. Some parents, including adoptive parents, post notices through social media that they can no longer care for their child and ask if anyone is willing to parent their child. This raises many concerns, including but not limited to the availability of post-adoption services and opportunities for child trafficking.

2014 Panel Recommendations

Chairperson Kennedy noted that each member had been given an outline of potential recommendations to consider before the next joint panel meeting. That meeting will be held on Oct. 2 with a video connection set up for regional offices.

The Panel reviewed and discussed the one-page descriptions for three possible recommendations topics:

- Public health framework for child welfare
- Children of Incarcerated Parents
- Child welfare workforce issues

The Panel discussed additional possible recommendations and the extent to which previous years’ recommendations were implemented or had an impact. Members noted that some recommendations were reiterated year after year and it was suggested that a careful look at OCFS’ implementation of these recommendations was called for.

3. Updates

Chairperson Kennedy announced that there are openings on the Panel and asked for recommendations for future appointments. Several names were suggested.

The Western Region Citizen Review Panel has written a letter to OCFS for an update on corrective actions related to a child fatality report.

Panel members then discussed possible agenda items for the next WCRP meeting, scheduled for Nov. 14 at 9 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.