

# **New York State (NYS) Citizen Review Panel for Child Protective Services**

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## **Meeting Summary**

**June 11, 2020 • 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

### **Participants:**

#### Eastern Panel Members

Sharon Chesna  
JoAnn Merriman

#### New York City (NYC) Panel Members

David Lansner  
Stan Capela  
Mathea Rubin

#### Western Panel Members

Linda C. Brown  
Sarlyn Tate  
Todd Sage  
Ellen Kennedy

#### Guests

Allison Veintimilla, Deputy Commissioner, Cortland County Department of Social Services  
Rashida Abuwala, Director, Redlich Horwitz Foundation  
Jessica Rothkuo, Senior Program Manager, Redlich Horwitz Foundation

#### Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI)

Jennifer Goldman  
Ellen Unruh  
Darlene Ward

### **Handouts**

Agenda 6.11.2020  
Materials from Redlich Horwitz Foundation  
Information sheet for CRP Candidates

**Welcome** – Linda C. Brown, Western Panel Chair

### **Impact of COVID-19 on Cortland County Department of Social Services (DSS)**

- Deputy Commissioner Allison Veintimilla joined the meeting to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on the Cortland County DSS.
- The majority of staff have been working from home, with some staff rotating for in-office coverage. Caseworkers continue to see children and families on their caseloads, but they are doing so with initial COVID-19 screening questions and then social distancing outside. Some staff have been furloughed.
- Child protective reports are significantly down in Cortland County.

- Cortland County is utilizing Zoom, Skype, and other telecommunications to get in touch with and follow up with families.
- A voluntary agency continues to provide visitation services for Cortland County. The County provided iPads to assist with virtual visitation needs.
- The Cortland County Family Court has been able to utilize technology to reduce delays of permanency hearings.
- Cortland County DSS continues to plan for re-opening including the ability to social distance in the office, onboarding workforce to handle the anticipated increase of cases as the county opens up, creating a standard work from home policy, and re-configuring the reception area to meet social distancing requirements.
- Cortland County is also planning for implementation related to the Family First Services and Prevention Act mandates.

### **Presentation from Redlich Horwitz Foundation (RHF)**

- Rashida Abuwala, RHF Director, joined the meeting to discuss RHF's response to COVID-19. This includes:
  - Fifteen grants across NYS to allow counties and non-government agencies to purchase devices and other technology tools for youth and families to achieve best practice in virtual care.
  - Trauma-informed Sensory Comfort Project for Youth in Residential Placement – a Building Bridges Initiative to provide comfort objects and strategies to youth in residential placement in NYS.
  - Family Court Initiative to Support Parent Representation Statewide - support to remotely train attorneys for children, parents, and the child welfare agencies on how to best use technology platforms to communicate with their clients and participate in virtual hearings and reviews.
- Jessica Rothkuo, RHF Senior Program Manager, joined the meeting to discuss RHF's Family First readiness efforts including:
  - Discrete funds for county requests
  - Regional learning collaboratives
  - Virtual workshops
  - Cohort of 18 counties in the second year of participation, supported by a nine-member consulting team and grants for individual counties
- Panel Members and guests from RHF then discussed RHF recommendations for COVID-19 and Family First readiness

### **Debrief and Next Steps**

- Jennifer Goldman, WRI, reviewed materials to support the recruitment of new CRP members.
- Panel members agreed to draft and share a CRP statement in response to racial inequality related issues in the country.
- Panel members agreed to continue to discuss and promote CRP awareness and member recruitment.
- Panel Chair Linda C. Brown adjourned the meeting.
- Next Panel Meetings
  - NYC – Tuesday, September 15

- Eastern – Thursday, September 17
- Western – Friday, September 25