

**Western Citizens Review Panel
Meeting Summary
March 16, 2018
9:00 a.m. - 11:30**

Attendees:

Panel Members: Melissa Cavagnaro, Ellen Kennedy (Chair), Danny Sklarski, Karl Wiggins (by phone), Linda Brown

Guests: Cheryl McMaho, CPS Case Worker, Niagara County
Melanie Reed, CPS Case Worker, Niagara County
Jennifer Seiflein, Administrative Director, Erie County
John Pease, CPS Coordinator, Erie County
Sandy Wojtaszczyk, Case Supervisor B CPS, Genesee County

WRI Staff: Jennifer Goldman, Citizen Review Panel Coordinator
Ellen Unruh, Associate Executive Director (by phone)

Handouts:

- Agenda
- Western CRP Minutes 12.15.17
- CRP Meeting Topic Survey Results
- Foster Care Unprepared for Drug Epidemic article
- Cliff notes on Family First Act
- HV Coordinator Proposal
- If We Had a Crystal Ball article
- ACS Letter to Gov. Cuomo
- Senator Pamela Helming letter
- SCAA First 1000 Days on Medicaid handout
- Erie County handouts

Welcome and Introductions

Ellen Kennedy, Panel Chair

Panel Chair Ellen Kennedy welcomed meeting attendees and convened the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM: Debrief from Advocacy Day

Ellen Kennedy, Panel Chair

Ms. Kennedy debriefed CRP Advocacy Day held on February 13, 2018. Panel Chairs met with legislative staff as well as staff from the NYS Division of Budget, and Committee on Children and Families staff (from both the Senate and Assembly). The CRP proposal for additional home visiting funding was well received; however, the current budget climate and many competing budget asks from other organizations makes full funding for home visiting unlikely, despite general consensus on the effectiveness of the program. Staff appreciated the Panels' clear and singular budget ask for home visiting funding, as well the provided district specific data, and conveyed that the Panels should consider starting advocacy earlier in the budget process.

Ms. Kennedy also reviewed the budget request letter submitted on behalf of the Panels by Senator Pamela Helming as well as the Home Visiting Workgroup budget proposal for funding for a Home Visiting Training Coordinator position. Ms. Kennedy also provided an update on the status of planning for a regional press conference.

AGENDA ITEM: County Roundtable – Impact of the Opioid Crisis on CPS

The Panel invited CPS staff from Erie, Genesee and Niagara counties to join the meeting to share their first hand experiences of the impact of the opioid crisis on CPS cases. Ms. Kennedy began the roundtable by asking each guest to generally describe the impact of the opioid crisis in each of their counties. Ms. Cheryl McMahoh, CPS Caseworker in Niagara County, shared that there has been a notable increase in Niagara County of infants born with positive toxicology for drugs, especially opiates. Niagara County is offering increased substance use services and is approaching the substance use as a disease requiring treatment rather than taking a punitive approach.

Ms. Sandy Wojtaszczyk, Case Supervisor B CPS, Genesee County shared that cases involving heroin use as well as cocaine use have been on the rise. Caseworkers in Genesee County have been receiving training from the Genesee County Drug Task Force. The county is also exploring the idea of training caseworkers on the use of Narcan.

Ms. Jennifer Seiflein, Administrative Director, and Mr. John Pease, CPS Coordinator, both from Erie County, echoed the notable increase of cases involving the use of opioids. Erie County's approach is to, first and foremost, develop a safety plan for the child(ren) in the house. Ms. Seiflein and Mr. Pease also noted that this crisis is having impact on families from all levels of socioeconomic status. They also noted that Erie County has trained caseworkers on the use of Narcan.

Panel members asked the guests what they thought would be needed to most effectively address the opioid crisis and limit its impact on CPS cases. Guests responded 1) education about drugs and their impact for the children in drug-using households, 2) increased substance use services availability for families and children, and 3) increased access to mental health treatment for both parents and children.

The guests also discussed the increasing complexity of cases involving substance use and most often also mental health issues and the lack of practical experience in most young caseworkers. Due to increased turnover of workers, more inexperienced caseworkers are taking on extremely complicated cases and a tremendous amount of responsibility.

Panel Chair Ellen Kennedy thanked all the guests for their time. The Panel determined that they would like to invite foster care workers from the represented counties to discuss the impact of the opioid crisis as the case moves from CPS and into Foster Care.

AGENDA ITEM: OCFS Updates

Lisa Gordon, OCFS

Lisa Gordon joined the meeting via phone to provide the following updates from OCFS:

Child and Family Service Review

OCFS is working with the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to finalize the approval of the New York State Program Improvement Plan. OCFS has added the Healthy

Families New York efforts into the plan and will continue to work on the initiatives contained in the plan while awaiting final approval.

Family Assessment Response

One county recently suspended the FAR program due to staffing issues but will readdress using FAR once those issues have been resolved. Otherwise, OCFS has been applying FAR techniques to various training sessions and integrating FAR principles into other areas of training and practice.

Home Visiting

OCFS received the Panels' report including recommendations to increase funding for home visiting programs. The agency supports the recommendation and will increase funding whenever possible, as stated in the official OCFS response from Acting Commissioner Poole.

CPS Caseload Roundtable

No update.

Raise the Age

OCFS issued a RFA to voluntary agencies for programs interested in adding beds to accommodate youth impacted by the Raise the Age legislation. Thirteen agencies submitted a response. OCFS is currently making plans to distribute a planning guide for implementation.

Family First Act

OCFS recently offered a webinar to explain the major aspects of the new federal legislation and is awaiting further guidance on implementation from ACF.

CWIS

CWIS is the potential replacement for the current CONNECTIONS case management system. OCFS is doing an in-depth analysis to determine if NYS should adopt the CWIS system.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids

NYS is working with Wendy's Wonderful Kids to place specialized recruiters in counties to identify adoptive homes for hard to place children such as older adolescents.

AGENDA ITEM: WRI Updates

Jennifer Goldman, WRI

Ms. Goldman provided a brief summary of activities from the Child Welfare Coalition as well as the Home Visiting Workgroup.

AGENDA ITEM: Closing Business

Ellen Kennedy

Panel members briefly discussed potential ideas for statewide recommendations as well as potential guests for the next meeting – May 18, 2018. Meeting was adjourned by the Panel Chair.