

Western Citizen Review Panel (CRP)
Meeting Summary
March 17, 2017
9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Attendees:

Panel Members: Linda C. Brown, Danny Sklarski, Ellen Kennedy, Karl Wiggins, Melissa Cavagnaro

Guests: Tim Hathaway, Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse NY
Sharon Rochelle, 1st Deputy Commissioner, Erie County DSS
Lisa Gordon, OCFS (by phone)

WRI Staff: Jennifer Goldman, CRP Coordinator and Program Specialist
Ellen Unruh, Associate Executive Director
Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director, (by phone)

Handouts:

- Agenda
- State Fiscal Year 2017-2018 Child Budget Recommendations
- Child and Family Coverage: Federal Health Update
- New York State Child and Family Services Review Opportunities for Improvement
- 12/16/16 CRP Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item: Welcome and Introductions

Ellen Kennedy

Ms. Kennedy welcomed meeting attendees and introduced new panel members and WRI staff.

Agenda Item: Prevent Child Abuse New York

Tim Hathaway, Executive Director

Mr. Tim Hathaway, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY) joined the meeting to inform the panel of current work at PCANY. Mr. Hathaway described PCANY's three focus areas of work:

1. Increasing public awareness to prevent child abuse by combatting public misconceptions about child abuse and how the child welfare system works, including the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign with the goal of starting the conversation of how the community can build stronger families to prevent child abuse.

2. Offering training and technical assistance for trainers in the areas of early childhood home visiting, parenting education, and community-based sexual abuse prevention through the "Enough Abuse" campaign. Enough Abuse is offered in several counties across New York State and utilizes community ambassadors to help debunk "stranger danger" as most sexual abuse is familial. The campaign also helps parents understand appropriate sexual development.

3. Advocating for policies that support the prevention of child abuse at both the federal and state level.

Mr. Hathaway asked panel members if there is anything that PCANY is “missing” in their work. Panel members responded that advocacy for increased funding for preventive services and the issue of the disproportionate representation of families of color could be added. Panel members then discussed issues related to innate biases in the child welfare workforce and the challenge of addressing those biases, including recruiting professionals of color to join the workforce.

Panel members then asked who the target audience is for the PCANY trainings. Mr. Hathaway responded that training participants could be any type of professional involved in the child welfare system from early childhood providers to law enforcement.

Mr. Hathaway then shared that the PCANY annual conference is scheduled for May 9 – 10 in Albany, NY and to look out for registration information.

Panel members thanked Mr. Hathaway for joining the meeting.

Agenda Item: Debrief meeting with OCFS/Legislators/Discuss local press conference

Ellen Kennedy

Panel members discussed organizing a local press conference to raise awareness of child protective issues in the area and determined that they would not pursue a press conference at the current time.

Ms. Kennedy briefed panel members on meeting the Panel Chairs and WRI held with New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Executive Staff and New York State legislators on March 6, 2017. Ms. Kennedy shared that legislators were very interested in the results of the federal Child and Family Service review results, and the OCFS Executive Staff is interested in continuing a frequent, open dialogue with panel members.

Agenda Item: Erie County DSS Updates

Sharon Rochelle, 1st Deputy Commissioner

Ms. Sharon Rochelle, 1st Deputy Commissioner from Erie County, joined the meeting to provide updates on issues and initiatives in Erie County Department of Social Services. Erie County is engaged in several initiatives to improve disproportionate minority representation in the child welfare system including a court improvement project, trainings with current staff and efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce such as a Masters in Social Work tuition reimbursement program.

Ms. Rochelle then provided an update of health home implementation in Erie County, sharing that implementation is moving more slowly than they had hoped but work is underway to move this forward.

Ms. Rochelle and panel members then discussed a recent, high profile child protective case that has been in the media and the impact of public and media perception on the morale of staff.

Panel members asked Ms. Rochelle about turnover of the child protective staff in Erie County. Ms. Rochelle shared that all staff are being trained in solution focused, trauma informed care. Erie County is also offering stress reduction workshops; however, the county still struggles with issue of insufficient pay for workers. The County is working on additional ways to support the staff in lieu of more pay such as offering job sharing or allowing four ten-hour workdays instead of the traditional five day work week.

Panel members then asked Ms. Rochelle about Erie County's use of the Family Assessment Response (FAR) alternative CPS track. Ms. Rochelle responded that Erie County withdrew from the use of FAR; however, the County is revisiting the use of FAR and has been in contact with OCFS to take steps to resume use.

Panel members thanked Ms. Rochelle for her participation in the meeting. Ms. Rochelle agreed to return to the Panel to provide updates in the future.

Agenda Item: OCFS Updates

Lisa Gordon

Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) /Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Ms. Gordon shared that NYS' PIP is due to the federal government at the end of March 2017. OCFS examined data and brought a group of stakeholders together to determine the best improvement strategies. Strategies include:

- Improving training,
- Reducing time to permanency,
- Improving the quality of data in CONNECTIONS,
- Improving the county CQI process,
- Increasing service array, including the use of the home health model, and
- Improving technical assistance and monitoring of foster care.

Family Assessment Response (FAR)

Ms. Gordon then discussed the use of FAR. Currently, 23 counties are using FAR. NYC is expanding the use to Brooklyn and expects to go citywide by the end of 2018. Technical support work for FAR is being transferred to CDHS. Last year, one county dropped the use of FAR, but legislation has since been changed so that workers can be assigned both FAR and traditional CPS cases to offer counties flexibility. OCFS is also doing some "marketing" to increase the use of FAR.

Home Visiting Programs

Ms. Gordon shared that OCFS is working to expand home visiting programs across the state. Last June, OCFS issued a RFP, expanding six current programs and adding one new program. OCFS is using adoption de-linking money to further expand home visiting.

Workload Study

Ms. Gordon did not have any updates to share on the Workload Study that Governor Cuomo asked for in his veto message of the caseload size bill in 2016.

Opioid Crisis

Ms. Gordon described OCFS' work to address the opioid crisis in child welfare. OCFS and the NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services regional offices are meeting quarterly to develop joint strategies. OCFS has been showing a documentary called "The Hungry Heart" during trainings to raise awareness. OCFS does not have any specific data available related to the opioid crisis but knows anecdotally that it is having an impact on the families that are served by the child welfare system.

Agenda Item: WRI Updates

Jennifer Goldman

Mrs. Goldman provided updates from Welfare Research, Inc. She distributed a handout from the Home Visiting Workgroup meeting detailing the impact of the potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act on children and families. Mrs. Goldman also shared the distribution plan for the CRP 2016 Annual Report.

Ms. Lee Lounsbury reminded panel members of the invitation from OCFS to attend the July 20, 2017 quarterly meeting that the OCFS Buffalo Regional Office convenes with counties and agencies in their region. Panel members discussed and concluded they are interested in participating. Ms. Goldman will follow up with panel members and OCFS regional office staff.

Agenda Item: Closing business

Ellen Kennedy

Due to a lack of time, panel members postponed the election of a new panel chair and vice chair until the next meeting in May 2017.

The meeting was adjourned.