

December 28, 2004

Foster Care Review, Inc.
3050 Biscayne Blvd. Suite 900
Miami, FL 33137

Re: 2003 Annual Report

Dear Ms. Pozo:

On behalf of the Department of Children and Families, thank you for the 2003 report as a Citizen's Review Panel. I appreciate your time and effort in creating the document and providing recommendations regarding child welfare practice.

- 1) Recommendation specific to court issues, decorum and documentation requirements. A new training program is being developed to address issues of attendance, preparation, follow through, documentation, etc. for caseworkers and supervisors. Components of the training will also include modules addressing appropriate visitation and case plans for individual families.
- 2) Recommendation of follow up with mental health and educational services. A memorandum was sent to the field regarding required documentation for the file. The training program should also address the need for follow up to prevent any lapse in needed services. In the MAPP training, it is part of the curriculum for foster parents and parents (when appropriate) to be involved in the children's education. The Department also has an interagency agreement with the Department of Education to encourage foster parents to be the surrogate parents for children in care who are on an Individualized Education Program.
- 3) Recommendation that braces be followed up on with Medicaid paying for the service. Medicaid is a federally funded program that does not pay for "cosmetic" procedures of any kind. It is true that Medicaid will not pay for braces unless it is deemed medically necessary to have the teeth straightened. The department will continue to explore resources in the State that may be able to address concerns around this issue.
- 4) Recommendations that more referrals are made to the Independent Living program for children who are eligible. The Independent Living Program
1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

provides assessments to identify needs of children in the State's custody. Caseworkers encourage children to participate in the Independent Livings programs. The caseworker's responsibility is to refer the eligible children to the program regardless if the child wants to participate or not.

- 5) Recommendation that the Independent Living Program be fully funded. The department will continue to request additional funding for the Independent Living Program.
- 6) Concerns that caseworkers were not always notified when a child has been picked up, is in detention or has been released from detention. Issues of delinquency and the lack of notification to caseworkers needs to be addressed. Policies will need to be reviewed with the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Children and Families to develop appropriate ways to respond to this need.
- 7) Children were found to be in inappropriate placements. In regards to placement matching for children, the best practice for children in the State's care is to appropriately match the child with the foster family to insure placement stability. However, the realities of child welfare, sometimes means that children are placed in a home that may not be the best option for that child at that time. Child welfare agencies work diligently to find the best placement for the child with the limited resources that are available. Placement matching is part of the State's program improvement plan and part of the training plan for caseworkers. The department continues to use the recruitment and retention plan to provide more appropriate foster care resources to reduce the number of placements for children.
- 8) Concerns that a child's behavior and/or refusal to participate in services continues to prolong his/her stay in the system. Older children do have the opportunity to refuse services intended to help them return home or successfully transition into a permanent placement outside of the home of origin. If children refuse to address their needs with the caseworker, it will be hard to discern what would be best for that child. The new training components will address engagement of children and their families, which should give the caseworker tools to avoid this kind of situation. Connections with families are always a preferred practice for children whether or not their plan is to return home or have another type of permanency plan. The new training program will address the necessity of keeping children connected to their families regardless of the plan.
- 9) Recommendations that the department hold periodic meetings with supervisors and administrators as well as have administrators visit a review hearing. It is also recommended that supervisors attend the review when the case is new or the worker is unavailable. The department will pursue dialogue with the Community Base Care organizations to

encourage continued periodic meetings with supervisors and administrators to discuss issues around cases and the reviews. The department will also encourage DCF administrators to visit a citizen review hearing yearly to keep updated on the process and value of the hearings. The department will encourage the Community Based Care organizations to provide supervision at the Citizen Review hearings when there is a new case or a case manager is unable to attend. The department will offer technical assistance to the districts to ensure case notices are being sent and that there is appropriate representation at the review hearings.

- 10) Recommendation of funding of the Guardian Ad Litem program. The department continues to have dialogue with the Guardian Ad Litem program to assist in their efforts to recruit volunteers for the program. The department understands the necessity of the Guardian Ad Litem program for the well being of the children in the State's care. The department will continue to share information regarding funding resources with the program and will support the program's request for further funding from the Legislature.

Again, I thank you for your time and commitment in creating your yearly report. The department is dedicated to the best interests of children in the State of Florida. Should you have any questions regarding this report, please do not hesitate to contact Kim Grosdidier, Supervisor for Protective Investigations and In Home Services, at (850) 922-5055.

Sincerely,

Beth Englander, Director
Child Welfare & Community Based Care