

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Response to the Citizen Review Panels 2008 Annual Report
October 27, 2009

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) received the 2008 Annual Report of the Citizen Review Panels (CRP) on June 12, 2009. CAPTA requires states to respond in writing to the CRP's annual report in no more than six months from the date the report is received by the state. As required by CAPTA and in keeping with our working relationship, we provide the following response to the concerns identified and recommendations for improvement made by the South Carolina Citizen Review Panels. The agency's response has been coordinated within DSS and with the agency's external partners who have responsibility for the areas impacted by recommendations made in the Annual Report.

The agency appreciates the efforts of the Citizen Review Panels over the past year as you have continued to grow through recruitment of new members. We recognize the challenges inherent in recruitment and orienting new members and DSS remains committed to working with you to improve the child welfare system. We will continue to use the monthly administrative meetings to enhance communications and advance mutual projects.

The Citizen Review Panels provide a unique opportunity for citizen input into South Carolina's child welfare system. Citizen participation leads to a better understanding of this complex system and of its strengths and areas needing improvement. The SC Department of Social Services welcomes input from the Citizen Review Panels and is pleased to work with the citizens of South Carolina in our joint effort to improve assessment and service delivery to children identified as abused or neglected. We look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year.

DSS RESPONSE TO THE CRP 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

Recommendation: The Panels recommend that DSS implement the use of the revised Passport and assure training that will support its full use.

Response to Recommendation:

The Passport for Children in Foster Care provides a central location for organizing the medical, educational, and mental health information about a child in foster care. It was developed in an effort to improve the wellbeing outcomes for children in foster care. The DSS State Director was a part of the development of the original Passport and remains committed to enhancing its design and promoting consistent use by workers and foster parents.

As noted in the 2008 Annual Report, members of the CRP have been involved in discussions about the Education and Health Passport for children in foster care and this input has served to strengthen the document. As part of the process to revise the Passport, agency staff from Foster Care worked with the Midlands CRP to gather recommendations to improve the Passport. Representatives from Richland County DSS, Kershaw County DSS, Intensive Foster Care and Clinical Services, SC Foster Parents Association, and teen foster children in GOALL provided input in the effort to revise the Passport. A copy of the revised Passport is included in this response.

The Education and Health Passport for children in foster care has been made more user friendly as it has been changed from a folded form with little space to write or to store documents to an 8½ x 11 inch form format with file pockets to keep documents safe. The foster parents can now download the form itself on a computer, type information on it, save it to a file, and print a hard copy. The foster care worker, age appropriate child, and foster parent can discuss the information at each monthly visit.

We believe that it is the joint responsibility of the DSS foster care worker and the foster parent to care for the child and to maintain history for each child. Revised agency policy clarifies that the Passport should be discussed on each visit and updated every 6 months at a minimum as required by good practice and to be consistent with federal law.

The revised Passport also addresses the outcome of maintaining family connections by including a specific page to list the important people in the child's life to help the child stay in touch. Feedback from foster parents says that the focus on including the foster parent in maintaining the child's history helps to make the foster parent feel more involved as a team member.

At the time of this response, the agency is in the process of finalizing the Passport and will be developing the supporting training over the next six months. We anticipate that the training will occur in several venues from the Foster Parent Association Conference to the regular ongoing training for foster parents provided by USC. We will use the DSS and CRP monthly administrative meetings to keep the Citizen Review Panels updated as to the progress on the training.

Recommendation: The Panels recommend that DSS evaluate current training and curricula which prepare staff to recognize and cope with the effects of grief and loss on children and families and also on the workers' abilities to provide services and use supervision.

Response to Recommendation:

This recommendation of the CRP was timely as the DSS Division of Professional Development and Leadership (PD&L) has experienced significant reorganization over the past year. One of the objectives of the interim director for PD&L is to review and evaluate all of the agency's training, and particularly training that is delivered to child welfare staff. This will include training delivered by agency trainers as well as the

training provided by the University of South Carolina under contract as the agency seeks to improve all of the child welfare training.

The child welfare basic training that is required of all new child welfare workers contains a specific module on loss and grief. PD&L will be evaluating its content and considering its effectiveness in providing new workers with the tools they need to assist children and families.

Courses delivered by USC include a number that address loss and grief as part of the modules. Below is a list of the training sessions where grief and loss is specifically addressed as part of the course. In all of these sessions, the target audience is child welfare workers unless otherwise noted. PD&L has obtained a copy of these modules to review as they continue to evaluate the content and effectiveness of all the child welfare training.

- Attachment
- Advanced Techniques for Identification, Intervention, and Prevention of Child Maltreatment
- Foundations for Caregiving: A Training of Trainers
- Enhancing Skills for Adoptive Parenting
- Sustaining Family Connections (4-part series)
- Preventing Disruptions
- Sharing Common Ground
- Building Empathy: Exploring the Impact of Foster Care Placement on Children, Birth Parents, and Foster Parents (for foster/adoptive parents only)

Because the review and evaluation of the child welfare training program is an agency initiative that has not been completed at the time of this agency response to the CRP, we will continue to use the monthly DSS and CRP administrative meetings to update you on the progress made. We will also continue to invite other agency staff or agency partners to participate in the monthly meetings to ensure timely and appropriate communications about recommendations or projects within and without the agency.