

**Children's Administration Response  
To the  
Child, Youth and Family Services Advisory Committee (CYFSAC)  
CAPTA Citizen Review Panel**

The following are CYFSAC activities and recommendations in an effort to improve the Child Protective Services system.

**CYFSAC Activities**

In 2007, the CYFSAC met regularly and examined local community needs, service delivery, CA policies and procedures and community collaboration related to child protection.

During the 2007 reporting period, the CRP continued the work begun in 2006 on racial and ethnic disproportionality by:

- Finalizing the initial CRP plan to examine racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity in Child Welfare Services in Washington State, herein called the Disproportionality plan.
- Beginning to implement the tasks of the CRP Disproportionality plan.

**CYFSAC Recommendation**

The Panel recommends that the department develop an action plan to address child placement decision points based on data with the intention of reducing racial disproportionality in the Washington State Child Welfare System.

**CA Response**

CA is in agreement that strategies are needed to address child placement and reducing racial disproportionality. CA will continue to work toward reducing disproportionality for all children of color where it exists.

Each year, CA prepares a quality assurance report on performance outcome data in compliance with RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031 (5). In addition, CA prepares an annual CA Performance Report. The reports serve to identify where CA needs improvement and examines those areas in which performance measures fail to meet federal and internal targets. Four priority goal areas include: safety, permanency, well-being and supporting client outcomes.

Since 2001, CA has tracked disproportionality in priority goal areas and identified it an issue needing improvement. Current strategies include:

FamLink - Washington State replaced its child welfare information system with a new web based information system (FamLink) in order to better support client service delivery. FamLink will enhance intake, child protective services, child welfare services and better support workers to make timely, informed decisions to achieve Washington's safety, permanency and well-being goals. This will give more accurate information on key child placement decision points.

Family to Family – Family Team Decision Meeting (FTDM) - FTDM involves birth families and community members, as well as social workers in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for children and the adults who care for them. Currently, Family to Family is available

in all offices in the state. To date, over 13,000 FTDM meetings have taken place and shown to have a positive impact on children in placement. Research is showing that FTDMs result in:

- More children placed with relatives
- A shortened length of stay for children placed with relatives
- Increased placement stability
- More reunifications with biological parents

Practice Model - In 2005, CA staff and management identified what had to be done to build a strong and sound foundation to support and sustain improved outcomes for children and families. This included having a well trained and supported workforce.

The objectives of this improvement initiative, “The Practice Model” was to provide an overarching framework for child welfare practice in Washington State and give social workers the tools, skills and support they need. The practice model team conducted a review of all assessment tools used by CA and in 2007, after considerable input from focus groups, national experts adopted an actuarial risk assessment model, Structured Decision Making® (SDM) to replace the former risk assessment tool.

SDM -- is a research-based, relatively simple and structured assessment. Its purpose is to identify families who are most likely to experience a future event of child abuse or neglect. The principle behind SDM is that decisions can be improved by clearly defined and consistently applied decision making criteria, readily measurable practice standards in an effort to minimize social worker bias. The expectations for staff are clearly identified and reinforce assessment results that directly affect case and agency decision making.

The components of SDM for child protective services include:

- Screening Criteria: to determine whether or not the report meets agency criteria for investigation.
- Response Priority: which helps determine how soon to initiate the investigation.
- Safety Assessment: for identifying immediate threatened harm to a child.
- Risk Assessment: based on research, which estimates the risk of future abuse or neglect.
- Child Needs and Strengths Assessment: for identifying each child’s major needs and establishing a service plan.
- Family Needs and Strengths Assessment: to help determine a family’s level of service and guide the case plan process.
- Case Planning and Service Standards: to differentiate levels of service for opened cases.
- Case Reassessment: to ensure that ongoing treatment is appropriate.

Assessment of Progress and Compliance - When CA adopted SDM as the risk assessment tool, there was a need to identify an alternative approach to the Reassessment of Risk. A statewide workgroup developed a tool to assess progress and compliance that incorporated an assessment of risk. The new Assessment of Progress and Compliance was implemented with Family Voluntary Service (FVS) social workers in October 2007.

Solution-Based Casework (SBC) - CA is implementing SBC as the foundation for child welfare practice in Washington State. SBC sets out the philosophy and theory of family-centered practice and directs the policies and procedures accordingly. Current practice and proposed changes within the CA will be evaluated in the context of how well they support the clinical model. SBC is found to be effective in engage families of color giving options/choices found to be effective.

KEY PRINCIPLES of a Solution Based Casework approach include:

- Understanding the family developmental tasks that are a challenge for the family and are interfering with child safety (Family Life Cycle Development)
- Identifying the pattern of high risk behavior in the family and ways to interrupt or stop patterns that lead to a child being harmed (Relapse Prevention)
- Planning in Partnership with the family by building a plan with the family that will resolve issues (challenges in everyday life) that get in the way of children being safe

As of March 2009, all CA offices have received an introduction to the new practices; the practice change has been piloted in three offices; and supervisors throughout the state have been trained on the new practice. By October 2009, all CA staff will have received training appropriate for their position on the Solution Based Casework approach.

Solution Focused Management (SFM) - To support social workers in their use of SBC, CA trained all management staff in SFM. SFM helps CA managers support social workers as they implement SBC. It's a parallel process that reinforces manager's use the same values, techniques, and language staff uses with their clients.

SFM involves identifying what's already working and amplifying it to make useful changes.

- Focusing on what's possible rather than on causes of problems.
- Getting managers to stop doing what isn't working and look for opportunities to do things differently.
- Encouraging managers to turn to the expertise and strengths within their team for solutions that work.
- Encouraging managers to apply solution focused principles and concepts in their management style, including language and questions derived from solution focused interviewing.

Indian Child Welfare – CA recognizes American Indian children also experience racial disproportionality and disparity. CA is committed to improve compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act mandates and improve outcomes for Native American children. Current strategies to achieve these goals include:

- Increase consultation and collaboration with tribes statewide.
- Comprehensive Indian Child Welfare Review
- Upon CA request, the CA Indian Policy Advisory Subcommittee agreed to function as one of Washington State Citizen Review Panels to:
  - Address the need for sustained efforts to address American Indian disproportionality.
  - Evaluate the extent to which the state is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with its Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) State plan.

\*CA recognizes more works needs to be done to address child placement and reducing racial disproportionality. Efforts have been and will continue to be to improve upon this.

### **CYFSAC Recommendation**

The CRP recommends the department monitor the effects of recent legislation regarding neglect referrals made to CA. The Panel's intention is for CA to identify and quickly address any

unintended consequences the legislation may cause in relation to racial disproportionality and disparity of services.

## **CA Response**

CA is in agreement about the importance of monitoring the effects of the neglect legislation. In 2006 CA Office of Training and Development, asked Dee Wilson, Director of Northwest Institute for Children and Families, to review the research literature on the relationship between neglect and race/ethnicity as a way of assessing the potential impact of the neglect legislation on racial disproportionality of children placed in out of home.

In his January 2007 summary, he wrote that any neglect initiative which increases the number of children placed in out of home care, has the potential of having a disproportionate impact on African American and Native American families. He noted, however, that CPS entries into care have increased in 2005 and 2006, and that the large majority of children entering care have been placed due to neglect. He said it is possible that the neglect legislation may not accelerate a trend that has already has a large impact on the number of children in out of home care, but may make it more difficult to slow or reverse this trend.

The legislation did not change the criteria for emergency placement of children, but it increased the power of CA social workers to pursue legal intervention when parents fail to follow through on voluntary service plans. To provide on-going support of the Neglect Legislation, the legislature allocated funding to CA. This funding was allocated in the following areas:

- Additional CA case carrying staff
- Additional funds for foster care placements
- Increased services
- Implementation/expansion of Evidence Based Programs/Promising Practices to serve neglecting families.
- Regional funding increase for basic support, IFPS, childcare and evaluations/treatment services

Training -- CA provided training to social workers and supervisors in January 2007 that focused on the legal aspects of the Neglect Legislation, legal duties of the department, prioritization criteria for services, evidenced based practices, what works best with neglecting families and how to engage neglecting families.

CA continues to offer engagement training as required post academy training. Neglect training CDs and DVD's that outline the trainings presented by the Attorney General's office and Dee Wilson are also available to staff. Understanding Neglect, presented by Dee Wilson continues to be also offered as on-going training for social workers.

Dependency Data - Juvenile dependency filings for FY08 decreased about 6% from FY07. This marks a reversal of a trend of annual increases in dependency case filings that started in 2002, the year the AGO started to collect data. According to Steve Hassett, Attorney General, the number of dependencies increased in 2002 and continued to increase until 2006. There was an increase in dependencies during one quarter in FY 2007 that resulted in a slight increase for FY 2007 overall. In FY 2008 the number of dependencies decreased and this appears to continue in FY 2009. This seems to indicate, the Neglect legislation has not resulted in an increase in dependency filings.

Termination cases also decreased in FY 08, down 8% from FY07. CA opened 1,154 new termination cases in the past fiscal year compared to 1,247 in FY07. FY07 showed a 6.4% increase from FY06, when CA opened 1,172 new termination cases. The average number of new termination cases per quarter was 288 for FY08, compared to 311 for FY07. The decrease in FY08 reverses a trend that began in 2001. From then until FY07, the office experienced a 75% increase in termination filings over the 7 year period.

The Department will continue to monitor and assess placement and dependency data to report progress and identify areas needing improvement.

### **CYFSAC Recommendation**

The department to address issues of racial disproportionality when developing new policies, practices and procedures.

### **CA Response**

CA strongly agrees with this recommendation and will continue to move forward in addressing racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system.

CA is lead for the DSHS Secretary for the joint DSHS Stakeholders and Washington State Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee (WSRDAC). The committee was created as a result of Substitute House Bill 1472 (2007). It's charged with creating recommendations to reduce and eliminate disparities and improve long-term outcomes for children of color.

In June 2008, CA partnered with King County Disproportionality Coalition, and Casey Family programs to co-sponsor the first Washington State Disproportionality Advisory Symposium. The purpose was to:

- Review regional disproportionality data.
- Begin to foster a movement that focuses racial disproportionality among children and families in WA State Child Welfare System at local, regional and statewide levels.
- Provide recommendations to the WSRDAC about what to consider in the remediation plan.

During the September 2008 WSRDAC meeting, six CA regions presented strategies and ideas to address disproportionality. These steps included:

- Creation of Regional Disproportionality Advisory Committees.
- Partnership with the CWTAP and EWU School of Social Work.
- CA & Regions to assess existing procedures and practices and their related impacts (both positive and potentially negative) on over-represented populations:
- Use the Racial Equity Impact/analysis tool to review policies & procedures at all levels (e.g., hiring practices, contracting, resource allocation, information system, licensing etc.)
- Fund Undoing Racism workshops for all child welfare stakeholders; Promote Undoing Racism in other child/family systems.
- Develop, test, and expand the use of a cultural resource center.
- Ensure timely and continued involvement with tribes (notification & engagement early on).

- Promote/convene multi-systems in an effort to address disproportionality such as in:
  - Higher education (schools of SW, law, etc.)
  - Juvenile justice
  - Mental health
- Host ongoing, informal dialogue on ICW issues (i.e., brown bag conversations).
- Resource ICW Permanency Planning to eliminate the need for long term foster care and support third party custody.
- Develop closer working relationships with the tribes and community to prevent placements.

In December 2008, WSRDAC created a remediation plan that includes recommendations for administrative actions. (Link to remediation plan). CA is working to develop plans to address and implement recommendations contained in the Remediation Plan.

- CA assigned the position, Special Assistant, Stakeholder Communication Manager” to coordinate the remediation plan and work with the Regional leads and community.
- DSHS Implementation Committee was created to address how agency is going to implement the Remediation Plan.
- Disproportionality Diagnostic Tool to use within workgroups to address disproportionality in policy development, including the Policy Conversion Project.
- Use of Race Matters Tool Kit to determine if policy or procedure captures culturally appropriate language and processes.
- Developed Keeping It Real video and Discussion Guide – A Training Resource for non-African American parents of African American children.
- Developing similar video and guide for addressing the needs of Native American children in care.