

**Children's Administration
Response to the
Region 2 Oversight Committee
CAPTA Citizen Review Panel**

The following are Region 2 Oversight Committee activities and recommendations in an effort to improve the Child Protective Services system.

Region 2 Oversight Committee Activities

In 2007, the Region 2 Oversight Committee met regularly and examined:

- Local community needs
- CA policies and procedures
- Data
- Service delivery
- Community collaboration

The Region 2 Oversight Committee FY 2007 recommendations and work plans focused on the following 3 arenas.

- External environment in which CA provides its mandated services.
- Internal needs related to quality service delivery. CA should examine and address the following areas.
- Difficulty in accessing CA services in Columbia County (2006 issue follow – up).

Region 2 Oversight Committee Recommendations

1. External environment in which CA provides its mandated services
 - a. Expand emergency placement resources. Three CA-Oversight RRP workgroups are underway to address this issue. Request CA HQ support unique contracts to meet this need.
 - b. Minimize the negative effects of the implementation of the Adam Walsh legislation by addressing concerns in a consistent manner once statewide contract is developed in July 2008.
 - c. Improve communication and understanding between Centralized Intake (CI), CA After Hours (AH) and Law Enforcement (LE).

2. Internal needs related to quality service delivery. CA should examine and address the following areas:
 - a. Sufficiency of staff work space
 - b. Staff safety concerns
 - c. Inexperienced line and supervisory staff
 - d. High staff turnover
 - e. Excessive documentation requirements
 - f. New policy overload (Reduce policy to two time per year) policy moratorium)
 - g. CA legal representation in Dependencies

- h. Workload issues
 - i. Personnel system barriers for replacing or adding staff
- 3) Inaccessibility of CA services in Columbia County (2006 issue follow – up).
- a. Improve communication between CA and education system by agreeing on plan of communication about changes within CA that impact the community.

Children’s Administration Response

Recommendation 1.a. Emergency Placements:

CA Region 2, with the support of CA HQ contracts unit, has expanded Emergency placement resources in Kittatis, Columbia and Walla Walla Counties. CA HQ contracts unit is committed to supporting regions with the contracting process.

Recommendation 1.b. Adam Walsh Legislation:

CA updated criminal background policies related to the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act legislation in July 2008. Guidelines for the Fingerprint & Background Check Process are attached at the end of this document.

http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/policy/walsh_contacts.asp

Recommendation 1.c. Improve communication and understanding between CI AH/LE:

Berta Norton, Region 2 Area Administrator, has been assigned to participate in Region 2 Oversight committee meetings. She is responsible for following up with Beverly Payne, CI Program Manager and After Hours staff whenever law enforcement issues arise. Problem solving can also occur during regularly scheduled statewide Intake Leads and CPS Program Manager meetings.

Recommendation 2. a. Sufficiency of Staff Work Space:

CA acknowledges the issue of securing appropriate space for staff is an ongoing concern. Currently, securing additional work space is not possible due to the economic situation. However, CA HQ Fiscal, Budget and Accounting will work with the regions in planning for increasing office space as soon as the budget will allow.

Recommendation 2.b. Staff Safety Concerns:

Social workers face risk each day in protecting children and serving families. Social Workers should always have law enforcement accompany them if they feel their safety, or the safety of the child or any other person included in the investigation is in question.

CA addresses staff safety in the following ways:

- Staff safety information in CA Operations Manual 8612 and 5100 (see attachment).
- Critical Incident policy and protocol, including a peer support team developed. Information is attached and can also be accessed at <http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/pdf/policy/CriticalIncident.pdf>.

- Social Workers have access to the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) database for subjects of CPS investigations and other adults related to the CPS investigation. This information is used to assess child and worker safety and is available for quick access at all times.
- Improved communication equipment for areas where cell phones do not work.
- More cars for social worker use.
- The Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC), in collaboration with the CA Office of Training and Staff Development and Training provides staff training on worker safety issues.
- The FamLink intake data system has a “warning indicator” information system. It displays if there is a danger to the social worker, if the person is a registered sex offender and if the person is a sexually aggressive youth. It also allows for any comments about the danger.

Recommendation 2. c. and 2.d. Inexperienced CA staff - High Turnover:

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. Practice Model achievements include:

- *Structured Decision Making (SDM)* - In October 2007, CA adopted an actuarial risk assessment model, Structured Decision Making® (SDM) to replace the former risk assessment tool after considerable input from focus groups, national experts and the Practice Model.
 - 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, with expectations of staff clearly identified.
<http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/policy/sdm.asp>
- *Solution Based Casework (SBC)* - CA chose SBC as the clinical model for child welfare practice because it’s a family centered practice that builds on a family’s strengths. Social workers are taught engagement skills, interviewing techniques, family life cycle development frameworks and relapse prevention techniques. These give social workers the skills and support they need to do their jobs well. The training and coaching is on-going, and training will be adjusted as CA receives critical feedback from supervisors and social workers.
<http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/practicemodel/sbcWhat.asp>

- *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.

More information about the Practice Model is located at:

<http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/practicemodel/index.asp>.

Additional efforts for having a well trained and supported workforce include:

- *Employee Satisfaction Survey (ESS)*. In October 2007, CA participated with other DSHS administrations in the on-line ESS in efforts to increase employee satisfaction. The survey was designed for staff to share their views of what it's like to work in CA and to identify areas of concern associated with the job and work environment. The survey showed improvements from the 2006 survey with continued improvement efforts underway. More information about what CA is doing can be found at:
<http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/ppt/qi/2007%20Employee%20Survey%20Action%20Plan.pps>. See also CA ESS plan attached.
- *Chemical Dependency Professionals*: An updated memorandum of understanding (MOU) has been completed between CA and the Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA). The agreement is designed to improve the working relationship between the two agencies and to provide more effective services to mutual clients. Currently, there are 8 Chemical Dependency Professionals statewide.
- *Family to Family* - CA partnered with the Annie E. Casey foundation in 2004-2006 in implementing four Family to Family strategies designed to improve child outcomes. These strategies are:
 - Building Community Partnerships
 - Family Team Decision Making (FTDM)
 - Resource Family Recruitment, Development, and Support
 - Self-Evaluation

All offices in the state are implementing Family Team Decision-Making meetings. CA is working towards achieving 100% capacity, however, this goal is also dependent upon available resources. To date, over 10,000 FTDM meetings have taken place.

Currently, 13 offices are actively developing all four strategies of Family to Family with more beginning the process all the time.

Research is showing that FTDMs supports child welfare practice by resulting in:

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

Recommendation 2. e. Excessive documentation requirements:

Washington State replaced its child welfare information system with a new web based information system (SACWIS) in order to better support client service delivery. SACWIS (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. FamLink will reduce the redundancy in documentation. However, documentation remains a key social worker function due to the importance of showing what work was done and why.

Recommendation 2. f. New policy overload:

As a result of input from staff and regional management, CA implements new or updated policies on a schedule of three times a year. Implementation occurs in April and October with an option to implement new legislated policies in July. This change was made in March 2007 and designed to:

- Provide a predictable schedule for policy and program changes.
- Bundle policy and program changes using an integrated implementation approach.
- Reduce the frequency of policy and program changes.

Recommendation 2. h. Workload/Caseload Issues:

Throughout 2006/07, CA participated in a Workload Study to determine how CA staff, who provide services to children and families spend their time and the nature of the activities they perform. This study was one of the most comprehensive in the country. The study reports that there is not enough time in the day for staff to accomplish all required work because of the workload and high number of cases.

Since the workload study, CA has examined a variety of ways to reduce workload/caseloads. In addition, CA has been working closely with Union Management Communication Committees and representatives to elicit the best ideas possible. Steps to reducing workloads/caseloads include:

- In 2008, CA was able to hire new staff approved and funded by the Legislature. CA will continue to ask for additional staff, but we have to be realistic that in hard economic times there will be significant strains on the state's resources and a need to decrease state spending to match revenue.
- Caseload size has been significantly reduced from an average of 26 cases in 2005 per social worker to 21 in 2008.
- SBC may help reduce caseloads. In Kentucky, a reduction in referrals occurred once offices were trained in SBC. Tennessee implemented a similar model, and also reported reductions in re-entry into care and re-referral. CA will monitor these outcomes with the implementation of the Practice Model.
- FamLink, the new information case management data system will also eventually help workload issues by reducing the number of steps to complete tasks by.
- Finally, the management teams are working with staff in each region to identify tasks that can be taken off social workers and supervisors plates. Plans, once approved, will be implemented in each region. While this will unlikely reduce caseload size, it should reduce workload.

Currently, efforts to reduce caseload are paying off. Data in the January Braam report, shows 65% of CA social workers have caseloads (involving children in out of home care) under 19.

Recommendation 2. h. CA legal representation in Dependencies:

It is the duty of the attorney general to handle dependency cases under chapter 13.24 RCW. In each county with a population of less than two hundred ten thousand, the attorney general may contract with the prosecuting attorney of the county to perform the duties of the attorney general under this section. Steve Hassett, Assistant Attorney General manages these contracts with county elected prosecutors. He is available to participate in problem solving with Ken Nichols and the local offices whenever issues arise.

Recommendation 2. g. Personnel system barriers for replacing or adding staff:

CA HQ Workforce Management Supervisor has been working with Region 2 Management in developing a creative plan to address barriers to hiring Region 2 After Hours personnel. Region 2 will participate in a pilot plan that incorporates a revised After Hours job description. The goal is to attract educational personnel that will meet Department of Personnel educational requirements.

Recommendation 3. Inaccessibility of CA services in Columbia County:

CA understands the panel and Region 2 staff are partnering in this effort and progress is being made.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to this report. Your recommendations help CA continue to improve our system of practice and outcomes for kids and families. The work of the panel members is greatly appreciated and we look forward to the continued partnership for FY 2009.