

State of Wyoming Citizen Review Panel, Inc.



Annual Report Summary
November 2005

The Citizen Review Panel is a federally mandated group of professional and private citizens who are responsible for determining whether state and local agencies are effectively discharging child protective responsibilities; pursuant to the 1996 amendments to the Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and any subsequent amendments. Through a review of policies, procedures, research and case review, the purpose of the Citizen Review Panel is to promote child safety and quality services to children and families.

During the period of January through June, 2005, almost 130 citizens and DFS staff were trained to conduct child abuse/neglect and juvenile probation DFS cases, using a scoring instrument. The reviewers looked at each case to determine if a child's safety, permanence and well-being were adequately addressed by the child protection system of DFS and the community.



A total of 95 randomly selected cases were reviewed in each of DFS's eight (8) districts. Each case was reviewed by a team of two people – one DFS employee and one citizen (non-DFS employee) using a scoring instrument. Fifty-two (52) child protection cases and forty-three (43) juvenile probation cases were reviewed. Additionally, focus group meetings were held with groups in a variety of Wyoming communities:

- School district social workers, counselors, nurses, teachers, administrators
- Community service providers
- Therapists and counselors
- Foster Parents
- DFS Case Workers
- DFS Managers and Supervisors

After the reviews were completed and scored, a team of Citizen Review Panelists met to analyze the results of the reviews. *Statewide results showed that DFS had improved the percentage of "strength" scores received in 18 of the 23 items since the last review was conducted in 2002 by a federal review team (only Cheyenne and Casper cases were reviewed by this team). This is quite an achievement, worthy of praise.*



However, percentage scores remained the same or decreased over the 2002 federal review in five item areas. These items areas were:
Item #7, Permanency goal for child;
Item #8, Reunification/Guardianship/Relative Placement;
Item #9, Adoption;
Item #11, Proximity of foster care placement; and
Item #16, Relationship of child with parents.

Therefore, the Citizen Review Panel made the following recommendations after analyzing the results of the case reviews and the focus group meetings.

Recommendations for DFS:

Recommendation #1:

Require the Department of Family Services to follow their own recommendation to implement the Family Centered Practice Model. The Family Centered Practice model assesses the whole family's needs so that the child's need for safety, permanence and well-being can occur by servicing the whole family. If policy were followed and if family centered practice was used with every family, in all DFS offices and with all cases, most case outcomes would improve. The Panel found that many "area needs improvement" scores were directly attributable to some family members not being involved in the case planning or in visitations with children and DFS case workers. Notably, family members left out most often were non-custodial fathers.

Recommendation #2:

Require the use of a consistent battery of assessments be given in all cases to the child and to all family members the child is associated with, including foster parents, if applicable. And, encourage providing services in a timely manner when needs are identified. If this was done, overall case outcomes would improve.

The Panel recognizes that in some communities, some services are filled to capacity or not available at all and the child and/or family must travel to other communities to receive services, which takes more time. The Panel also recognizes that some families refuse services offered by DFS and the community. Finally, the Panel recognizes that all community services in Wyoming are not of the same quality and do not meet the individual needs of all children and families, thus opening the window to failure even when DFS has the best intentions in mind for the families and children it works with.

Recommendation #3:

Require consistent case file format across the state. Reviewers and case workers alike noted difficulty in finding necessary items in the case file. This may account for some lack of steps being taken by a DFS caseworker with a family, as it was difficult to determine what had been done in a case when referring to the file. Consider a format that is easy for the case worker to navigate. Involve case workers in determining case file format.

Recommendation #4:

Develop a system that will easily and consistently inform case workers, managers and supervisors of DFS policies, changes in DFS policy and other rules, laws and regulations needed to perform their jobs. Quite often when an item was rated as “area needing improvement” there was discussion between reviewers, case workers and management. The discussion often revolved around someone not being aware of a policy or change in policy. The Panel suggests adding a “technical assistance” box on the DFS web site that pops up when a DFS employee turns on his/her computer. The “technical assistance” box could state a variety of messages, from upcoming training information to policy reminders and policy changes.

Recommendation #5:

Report to the Citizen Review Panel about exactly how the review scores are being used by DFS across the state.

Recommendations for systemic change: The following recommendations pertain not only to DFS but to other Wyoming child protection systems as well.

Recommendation #6:

Require those involved in the court systems in Wyoming to act on termination of parental rights and adoption procedures with urgency and consistency, as there are Wyoming children who are counting on them for permanency in their lives. Most striking of the review findings were that judges, district attorneys and guardian ad litem functioned differently in each county, thus having a different effect on cases, either positively or negatively.

Recommendation #7:

Require the strengthening of; continuance of; and creative additions to community partnerships and good communication between them and DFS as they pertain to these cases. Realize that there is a need in some Wyoming communities to establish physical health and/or mental health resources for these Wyoming children and families, especially as they pertain to drug addiction.



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