

SPECIAL REPORTS

Citizen Review Board 2009-2011 Biennial Report

CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD Oregon's Foster Care Review Program

2009-2011 BIENNIAL REPORT



CRB Mission

We provide a citizen voice on the safety, stability, and supervision of children in foster care through impartial case review and advocacy.

CRB Vision

Citizens will shape public policy and actively promote conditions to ensure that every child lives in a safe, secure, healthy, and permanent home, preserving families whenever possible.

Every Day Counts...

in the life of a child in foster care.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Leola McKenzie, Director of Juvenile Court Programs

Oregon's courts and Citizen Review Board (CRB) play crucial roles in protecting the safety and well-being of Oregon's vulnerable children. In this state, no child enters or leaves foster care without court approval; and no family reunification, adoption, or guardianship happens without court approval. Our courts ensure the basic rights of children and parents are respected when children are within their jurisdiction. It is the courts that have the responsibility for ensuring that public officials meet their legal responsibilities to children of this state – to keep them safe, to secure permanent homes, and to promote their well-being during the time that the state is acting as their parent.

The CRB program supports the role of the court. The 299 volunteer board members who serve on 67 local boards play a key role in assisting the court to provide oversight on behalf of Oregon's children, and bring a community perspective to each case. They provide an invaluable service in guarding the safety, supervision, and stability of children in foster care through impartial case review and advocacy. The judges and staff of Oregon's state court

system value the unique role these citizens play.

For the last two years, Oregon courts and CRB have been weakened by budget reductions and furloughs. The CRB reduced or kept vacant 10 positions. Having fewer staff has forced CRB to eliminate the review of juvenile delinquency cases, consolidate boards, and to re-engineer processes to operate on less revenue, while maintaining or improving the delivery of services. The CRB has leveraged technology by developing and implementing the use of ePackets instead of paper copies, transmitting voluminous child welfare reports to volunteer board members electronically. Currently, 62% of our volunteers are receiving ePackets only and another 16% are on a trial period of receiving both the ePacket and paper case material. The CRB is also working to distribute electronic notices and their Findings and Recommendations documents to judges and attorneys.

On behalf of the Oregon Judicial Department, I extend my gratitude to each volunteer for your commitment, time, and energy. Your ongoing support and commitment during these difficult budget times is truly remarkable. Oregon courts, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the thousands of children and families involved in the foster care system have been well served by competent and dedicated volunteers.

This report provides information on the work of Oregon's Citizen Review Board. In these economically challenging times, it is apparent that the entire child welfare system is struggling to provide mandated and needed services to children and families. Federal and state laws focus on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families. Given this context, and in keeping with the CRB's commitment to providing quality recommendations for systemic change in Oregon's child welfare system, this report spotlights promising initiatives, challenges, and recommendations in each of these areas.

Sincerely,

Leola McKenzie

Leola McKenzie
Director of Juvenile Court Programs
Oregon Judicial Department



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BIENNIUM AT A GLANCE

CRB TURNS TWENTY-FIVE

2010 marked the 25th year of the Oregon CRB! In 1980, Congress enacted Public law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. The law emphasized a family focus rather than an exclusive focus on children. Congress wanted first priority to be given to preventing removal of the child from the home. Reunification of the family was to be the primary goal if the child was in substitute care. For the first time, reasonable efforts to prevent removal and to promote reunification were required to be documented in the child welfare agency case plan for a state to receive federal funding for substitute care. PL 96-272 encouraged family involvement in development of the case plan and required six month case reviews for children in substitute care.

DHS (at that time named Children's Services Division) set up an in-house review system to meet federal case review requirements. This in-house review system suffered from the public's perception that an agency reviewing its own actions cannot be truly impartial or objective. There were strong feelings that the reviews should be conducted by independent review boards. In 1985, Oregon's legislature established the Citizen Review Board, a statewide foster care review program of citizen volunteers under the direction of the Oregon

Judicial Department. Today, 67 local boards are ensuring the children in foster care throughout Oregon have plans that lead to safe, permanent homes; meet the needs of the children and family; are implemented in a timely fashion; and comply with all laws.



Volunteer board members at the 2009 Governor's Volunteer Awards Luncheon. From left: Mary Hill, Nora Schliske, Susan McAnulty, Bill Distad, Toni Phipps, Carl Christman, Jean Gauthorn, Jann Sparks, Catherine Leary, Heather Eason, and Cynthia MacKay.

GOVERNOR'S VOLUNTEER AWARD

The CRB was selected to receive the 2009 Governor's Volunteer Award in the Statewide Volunteer Program category. These awards are given to recognize individuals and organizations in the state for their dedication, commitment, and determination in promoting and supporting volunteerism in our state.

The CRB was honored at the 2009 Governor's Volunteer Awards Luncheon on Friday, October 2, 2009, at the Salem Conference Center. This event was held in conjunction with the Oregon Civic Engagement Conference. CRB volunteers, staff, and juvenile judges were in attendance to accept the award and honor the work of volunteer board members who dedicate themselves to some of Oregon's most vulnerable children and families.

CRB TRAINING

The CRB places a high value on supporting its volunteers, staff, and community partners with ongoing continuing education opportunities. Prospective volunteers must complete a 16-hour

You are the eyes and ears of the court, a part of the court's conscience. You are also the eyes and ears of society, and part of its conscience.

Reviewers are one of the few institutions where the problems of the family, the efforts of the State, and the work of the judiciary meet.

You are able to see what is working and what is wrong.

Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz
New Jersey Supreme Court

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orientation training prior to beginning their service. Additionally, all volunteers must complete a minimum of eight hours of training each year, including at least one hour specifically dedicated to cultural responsiveness. In the 2009-11 biennium, the CRB conducted 21 orientation trainings for prospective volunteers and, as a group, volunteer board members logged 11,371 hours of training.

The CRB also organizes and sponsors, with assistance from the Juvenile Court Improvement Program, an annual two-day statewide conference called Every Day Counts. The conference focuses on current issues in child welfare and both volunteer board members and community partners are invited to attend. After a one year hiatus due to budget reductions, the conference made a vibrant return in the 2009-11 biennium with a new format - longer workshops focused on practical application of concepts during reviews.



Yamhill county volunteer board members at the Every Day Counts conference in April 2010. From left: Elizabeth Thompson, Marcene O'Neil, Anne King, and Michal Alkoff.

The CRB held two conferences in the 2009-11 biennium, each having approximately 225 attendees. Highlights of the conferences included workshops on disproportionality and disparity in child welfare; engaging teens in reviews; assessing parental progress; new DHS policies for relative placements; and a keynote address from Kevin Campbell, founder of the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness.

At the local level, CRB staff organized or assisted in providing over 130 regional and brown bag lunch trainings for volunteer board members and community partners. CRB staff also helped facilitate Juvenile Court Improvement Program events, including the Legislative Road Shows and the annual Model Court Day.

ELIMINATION OF DELINQUENCY REVIEWS

In response to Oregon's half-billion revenue shortfall in the 2009-11 biennium, the CRB was asked to plan for a general fund budget reduction of \$99,945. Because the CRB had already reduced its general fund budget by \$825,000 since the 2007-09 biennium, planning for the additional cut was extremely challenging. After careful consideration, the CRB discontinued reviews of delinquency cases in August 2010, resulting in staff reductions and the elimination of 11 boards.

Reviews of delinquency cases are not mandated by federal and state law, and the CRB cannot collect federal funds to support them because Oregon opted out of IV-E funding for delinquency cases. With the staff reductions necessary to implement the budget cuts, eliminating delinquency reviews was the only way to not overburden remaining staff and maintain quality reviews of dependency cases.

CONSOLIDATION OF BOARDS

ORS 419A.090 allows the joining of local boards in contiguous counties if the population is fewer than 100,000. In August 2010, the CRB combined boards in 10 counties into 5 multi-county boards to further reduce costs and improve efficiencies. Parties who are unable to attend a review in-person can participate by phone or videoconference. In fact, 3 multi-county boards have volunteer board members who regularly appear by videoconference.

CRB ePACKETS

Prior to the 2009-11 biennium, the CRB was spending about a quarter of a million dollars each biennium copying and mailing case material to volunteer board members. In October 2009, the CRB started an ambitious project to send that material electronically. It began by mailing case material on disks (called ePackets) to 19 volunteers who agreed to test the technology.

Three months later, the CRB was ready to roll ePackets out statewide. All volunteer board members were introduced to ePackets during a review day and invited to participate in a three-month trial period where they would receive both the ePacket and paper case material. By the end of the first trial period, the CRB had further enhanced the efficiency and cost effectiveness of ePackets by sending them to board members electronically via the OJD Secure File Transfer site. Today, 62% of

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volunteer board members are receiving ePackets only and another 16% are in the trial period. Additionally, all new volunteers are expected to use ePackets unless they do not have a computer or require and accommodation for a disability.

In October 2010, the CRB also began working with local DHS offices to have them submit case material to the CRB electronically. Up to that point, all DHS offices were either mailing or shuttling paper copies of the material. CRB staff would then scan the material for inclusion in the ePackets. Today, DHS offices in 31 counties are submitting case material to the CRB electronically. This has paved the way for some local courts to also begin accepting filings electronically from DHS.

COORDINATING REVIEWS

When courts and local boards are not coordinating, their reviews can sometimes occur within a short time of each other. Some judges and community partners consider this duplicative and wasteful. Others feel CRB reviews are different enough that they are actually helpful when held just before a court review. Whether they are helpful or not, there is general recognition that in these times of budget shortages, "duplication" should be eliminated wherever possible.

For the last two years, the CRB has made reducing duplication a priority. CRB staff have been working closely with local courts to define a schedule for CRB and court reviews. In 2010, a team of CRB and DHS representatives from three counties (Lane, Marion, and Washington) began meeting to identify causes of duplication and develop strategies to address them. As a result, CRB staff in those counties started checking the court's case management system for recent or upcoming court hearings before scheduling reviews. This practice will be implemented statewide in April 2012. The DHS/CRB Memorandum of Understanding was also updated to allow cancellation of additional CRB reviews based on certain upcoming hearings.

ESTABLISHING AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In July 2010, a CRB Advisory Committee of 15 volunteer board members from across the state was established to provide input and advise to the CRB Director on matters affecting CRB policy and administration. Committee members participate in a monthly conference call and occasionally meet in-person. In the 2009-11 biennium, committee

members provided guidance to the CRB Director on implementation of ePackets, budget reductions, staffing changes, training programs, and systems issues.



Clatsop County volunteer board members. From left: Dan Leedom, Joan Pratt, Raedetta Castle, Phyllis Castle, William Berg, and Rodney Merrill.

VOLUNTEER BOARD MEMBER POLICY MANUAL UPDATE

Beginning in January 2009, a team of CRB staff and volunteer board members started drafting a manual of policies and procedures that directly impact volunteer board members. Many of the policies and procedures were clarifications of those already in effect while others were entirely new. A set of professional standards was established for volunteer board members, and a formal procedure was developed for recommending whether prospective board members could continue with the appointment process based on skills demonstrated during the orientation training. The manual was sent to all volunteer board members for review and comment prior to being finalized on April 1, 2010.

CASE NOTES SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET

The Case Notes Supplemental Sheet is a tool that provides volunteer board members with information on relevant laws and policies and assists them in identifying areas of focus for each finding required during reviews. In April 2010, the CRB's Cultural Competency Committee, composed of both CRB staff and volunteer board members, updated the supplemental sheet with information to help board members ensure child welfare case plans are culturally appropriate and comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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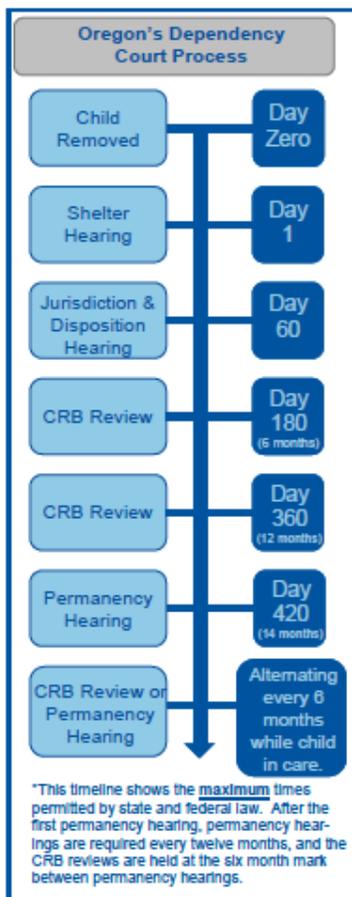
WHO ARE THE CHILDREN THE CRB REVIEWS?

Federal regulations require periodic reviews of children in foster to ensure their placements and services are appropriate and timely. These reviews begin 6 months after a child enters care and continue at least every 6 months until the child leaves care. In Oregon, the courts and CRB share responsibility for conducting these reviews. Below is a diagram of Oregon's dependency court process which shows this alternating review schedule.

This report provides information about the children whose cases were reviewed by the CRB between July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2011. It is important to remember that these are not all of the cases that are managed by DHS. According to DHS data, 20% of the children who enter foster care are returned home within three weeks; therefore these cases are not reviewed by CRB. In addition, CRB does not review

cases when children are able to stay in the home while families receive services, or cases that are being investigated. Thus, unless otherwise noted, the statistics and other descriptive information in this report are limited to the cases of those children in foster care for six months or longer who were reviewed by the CRB.

The CRB, therefore, has a unique perspective on children and families who are involved in the foster care system. While one third of the cases that are reviewed each month are "new" to the CRB, these children have actually been in foster care for six months. About half of the cases reviewed each month are of those children who have been in care between one and three years. Nearly a quarter of the cases reviewed each month involve children who have been in foster care for three years or longer.



Length of Time in Foster Care at Time of CRB Review
(includes only dependency reviews)



Age		
	Children Reviewed by CRB*	Oregon Children**
Under 6 Years	37.2%	32.4%
6 - 11 Years	26.5%	33.8%
12 - 17 Years	31.1%	33.8%

Race/Ethnicity		
	Children Reviewed by CRB*	Oregon Children**
African American	4.7%	2.3%
Native American	8.0%	1.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.1%	4.1%
Caucasian	69.9%	66.0%
Hispanic	14.8%	20.8%

*Includes only dependency reviews.

**2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

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SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN CARE

News headlines and special reports about abuse in foster care cause serious concerns. When children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care, DHS must ensure that they are safe.

PROMISING INITIATIVES

- The Moving Beyond Foster Care initiative is dedicated to safely and equitably reducing the number of children in foster care and improving the lives of the children who remain in foster care. This initiative has brought together DHS, the governor, the State Commission on Children and Families, Oregon courts, legislative leaders, and community stakeholders to develop coordinated strategies for long-term, sustainable change.
- DHS efforts to shift the paradigm from a "removal system" to "upfront" community-based, culturally competent services to support families are continuing and realizing positive results in some parts of the state where they have developed community-based systems that support family preservation.
- Courts Catalyzing Change initiative provides strategies, and tools to assist dependency courts in taking specific actions to reduce racial disproportionality and disparate treatment of children and families of color.
- DHS convened the Foster Care Safety Team that delivered findings and recommendations for improving the safety of children in foster care. The team's highest priority for action was centered on three areas that the team felt must be resolved in order to move toward ending abuse in foster care: workload, communication, and documentation.

CHALLENGES

The CRB has said for many years that, for the most part, DHS is an agency with sound policies in place. We are concerned, however, that somewhere between policy development and line implementation, there is a breakdown. Volunteer board members routinely express concern about failure to implement policy consistently. The current budget environment that has resulted in reduction of staff in DHS heightens our concern in this area.

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Frequent, quality visits by caseworkers with children in foster care are essential to their safety and well-being at all ages. The policy is there, but implementation has always been a challenge, and we see it getting worse. The CRB stands ready to assist DHS in any way to monitor policy implementation, especially as it relates to the safety of children in foster care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consistent implementation of policy regarding face to face visits between caseworkers and children in foster care, including visits in the foster home.
- Consistent implementation of certification and training policies to ensure that foster parents are adequately prepared to meet the needs of children in their care.
- Consistent and ongoing implementation of the new relative search and engagement policy to provide opportunities for foster children to be placed with or have connections with relatives.



Citizen Review Board,
Thank you for
meeting with me.
I felt heard for the
first time in the
DHS system. My son
is getting services
and counseling. I
feel like this is thanks
to your
intervention. The
situation has
improved.
Thank you for all you
have done.

Sincerely,
KM,
Parent of Child

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SPOTLIGHT ON PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Volunteer board members value stability and permanency for children in foster care. For those children who must be in foster care, there should be few changes in foster care placements, and reasonable efforts must be made for them to achieve permanency, preferably by returning home, in a reasonable time. Volunteer board members have a close-up view of the complex problems families of abused and neglected children experience: alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, law enforcement involvement, mental health issues, cognitive difficulties, and inadequate housing. Each of these factors can negatively impact stability.

PROMISING INITIATIVES

- Wrap-around services for children with high behavior and mental health needs were implemented in three project sites.
- DHS updated Oregon Administrative Rules related to the agency's obligation to search out, notify, and engage relatives. Findings from federal Child and Family Service Reviews indicate that relative placement is strongly associated with placement stability and achieving permanency through reunification or permanent placement with a relative.

CHALLENGES

- Oregon's ongoing budget crisis has resulted in fewer services being available. Caseworkers are more frequently reporting to CRBs that due to budget cuts, a previously court ordered service or CRB recommended service is no longer available or there are long wait lists due to reduced services. Although we acknowledge that the budget situation is real, there are no exceptions in federal or state law regarding reasonable and active efforts.
- CRB collected data on relative engagement and agency efforts to search for and place children with relatives. Of the 1,052 children reviewed during the months of April and May 2010, CRB found that 69% were placed with a relative or someone known to them prior to removal, and the agency made diligent efforts since the last review or court hearing in 70% of the cases. For children with APPLA plans (long term foster care), only 13% were placed with relatives.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Wrap Around Services need to be implemented statewide.
- DHS needs to work with other entities to ensure that limited available community services are prioritized to address the needs of foster children and their parents.
- DHS should encourage collaborations with local community groups, faith based organizations, and not-for-profits to find alternatives for the services that children and families need.
- DHS and the Juvenile Court Improvement Program should provide cross-training for the people involved in the child welfare system (caseworkers, foster parents, attorneys, judges, CRB volunteer board members, and court appointed special advocates) on relative rules and engaging families, because increasing relative placement and engagement in the lives of foster children may well be the best way to improve outcomes for kids and increase confidence in the child welfare system.

Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear.

Nelson Mandela



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SPOTLIGHT ON WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN CARE

When children are in foster care, the state is essentially acting as their parent. Federal law requires DHS to ensure the well-being of children in foster care. Volunteer board members bring the community perspective about the well-being and supervision for children.

PROMISING INITIATIVES

- The CRB works closely with the Juvenile Court Improvement Program and Oregon trial courts to help establish local policies for courts to consult with children during permanency hearings.
- The Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was passed and implemented in Oregon, allowing the state to receive federal (IV-E) support for certain children in foster care, adoption, and subsidized guardianships until age 21.

CHALLENGES

- All children need support and advocacy to ensure educational success, which leads to successful adult lives. Educational stability is an important component to success. Foster children face unique challenges including: the consequences of their abuse and neglect, consequences they experience as they change foster homes which may mean a change in schools, and delayed academic progress and loss of credits due to school disruptions. CRB participated in a national data collection effort on meeting the educational needs of children in foster care. We collected educational data on all CRB reviews conducted between July 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009. The CRB found: 26% of children age 3-5 were not enrolled or assessed for Head Start or another early childhood educational program; 27% of children age 16 or older were not on track to graduate or receive a GED; and only 32% of children reviewed for the first time by the CRB were able to remain in their original school at the time of placement into foster care.
- Transition planning policies are not consistently implemented by DHS workers and there are not enough Independent Living Program services to meet the needs of teens in foster care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Local Moving Beyond Foster Care (Casey) teams and local Model Court teams should encourage involvement of educational representatives to engage them on the issues and possible collaborative solutions to better meet the needs of children in foster care.
- DHS staff should consistently implement policies related to educational assessments, special education services, and Independent Living and Transitions services.

Every Day Counts...

...in the life of a child in foster care.



DeaQuan, age six, has been in care since an early age. He is very warm and affectionate, and loves being around people. Having already spent too many birthdays and holidays with several different families, it's time he has one of his own.

Our special thanks to the "Heart Gallery of Lane County—a Family for Every Child," for providing the information and photo at left. Their mission - "to find a loving permanent family for every waiting Oregon foster child." For more information visit their website at:

www.afamilyforeverychild.org

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CRB STATISTICS 2009 - 2011 BIENNIUM

COUNTY	CRB REVIEWS*	CHILDREN REVIEWED**	INTERESTED PARTIES IN ATTENDANCE	BOARD DAYS	AVERAGE MINUTES PER CRB REVIEW
Baker	90	62	412	24	38
Benton	77	64	347	13	36
Clackamas	463	441	1823	89	33
Clatsop	228	210	950	36	29
Columbia	211	203	723	30	32
Coos	377	478	1556	55	33
Crook	64	57	253	20	39
Curry	88	80	259	16	31
Deschutes	242	205	1064	48	43
Douglas	492	474	2426	60	34
Grant	32	13	131	8	39
Harney	55	40	281	12	49
Hood River	65	43	303	12	31
Jackson	676	582	3133	99	33
Jefferson	76	66	270	17	42
Josephine	393	379	1636	56	34
Klamath	495	371	2089	83	29
Lake	20	17	57	7	38
Lane	1852	1595	7378	227	32
Lincoln	267	196	1352	47	38
Linn	401	327	1633	57	32
Malheur	145	144	537	28	42
Marion	1460	1390	5114	241	36
Morrow	34	29	81	13	33
Multnomah	492	507	1082	116	30
Polk	282	216	863	47	36
Tillamook	92	87	439	13	32
Umatilla	314	286	1301	47	34
Union	84	63	412	24	35
Wallowa	14	10	76	6	42
Wasco	192	159	839	31	30
Washington	566	707	2076	143	40
Yamhill	210	260	1023	28	37
STATEWIDE	10549	9761	41919	1753	34

*Information in this table on CRB Reviews includes Dependency and Delinquency reviews during the time period.

**A child reviewed twice or more only counted once.