

crb network news

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newsletter of the citizen review board

Photo: Terry Svay



Every Day Counts ...

Youth homelessness, gender diversity, and state marijuana law addressed at CRB conference

There may be as many as [24,000 homeless or runaway youth on any given day in Oregon](#) – and up to 2,000 alone in the Portland area, said Beth Burns during her keynote address at the annual *Every Day Counts ... Conference* in May.

“For many, life on the streets is just a short walk from foster care,” Burns said. “Overall, 27 % of the homeless population has spent time in foster care.”

Children who’ve been in foster care are at a greater risk of becoming homeless at an earlier age than their non-foster care counterparts, and they remain homeless for a longer period, said Burns, executive director of [p:ear](#), a Portland-based mentoring program for homeless teens.

“There’s this too-common notion that these young people are living some sort of lifestyle choice, that they’re rebels and thrill seekers,” she continued. “But homelessness isn’t thrilling. It’s dirty, isolation, trauma, sadness and absolute vulnerability.”

Yet it doesn’t have to be hopeless, she stressed. Burns described how one of her peer students – a teen mother who survived a tumultuous childhood, homelessness, and drug and alcohol abuse – recently graduated from law school in Pennsylvania. Burns mentored the girl throughout her life

“I tell this story because sometimes you just don’t know” the outcome, Burns said. “She’s an incredible example of how long it takes and how important caring and loving relationships are in a

See “Conference,” p. 3

CRB Annual Report available

The Citizen Review Board recently released its *2015 Annual Report*. It can be accessed by visiting the reports section of the [CRB website](#) or by simply clicking [HERE](#).

The report provides statistics tallied by the CRB last year, such as the number of cases reviewed, parties in attendance and average length of time for a review.

The document also runs down some of the highlights of the CRB from 2015, starting with the program’s 30th anniversary; the CRB has helped shape public policy and promoted conditions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in foster care since 1985.

Other accomplishments include the creation of a five-year strategic plan for the CRB crafted by employees and volunteers, the establishment of CAPTA panels in three Oregon counties, and the implementation of a specialized board in Marion County responsible for reviewing that county’s foster cases involving youth ages 15 and older.

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Examining foster care cases through prism of needs hierarchy

By Sam Tazumal, CRB Field Manager

There are multiple theories that are helpful in understanding human behavior. Unlike other psychologists of his era, the renowned Abraham Maslow focused his work on what people were doing well.

As part of his work, Maslow developed a pyramid of hierarchy of needs emphasizing the following:

SELF-ACTUALIZATION - This is the rare level where people have need of purpose, personal growth, and realization of their potentials.

SELF-ESTEEM NEEDS - On this level, people act from their ego needs. They value the opinions of others in order to believe in themselves. It is a matter of self-respect through respect from others.

LOVE AND BELONGING - On this level, people need to feel loved. Here, loving one's self has not been fully discovered.

SAFETY NEEDS - This involves security and protection from harm. Here, we might include living in a safe area away from threats.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS - Food, sleep, etc. People on this level tend to be sick or in emergency-type situations. They have biological needs for physiological equilibrium. People who lack of shelter, clothing or food focus on those needs.

The needs are arranged in a hierarchical order. The upward climb is made by satisfying one set of needs at a time. The most basic drives are physiological. After that comes the need for safety, then the desire for love, the quest for esteem, and, finally, self-actualization.

With this in mind, then, let us consider parents who are trying to meet the requirements of the court and the Department of Human Services. Depending on where you live, you are likely to hear that a parent is couch surfing at best, or homeless at worse. According to Maslow, if you are starving and craving food, that will trump all other goals. Is it a wonder then that a parent is not able to make

progress — and might even appear to “not care?”

The caseworker might be frustrated by the lack of progress, stating that the parent is missing appointments or treatment without seemingly a valid reason. Housing may be a more immediate need than, say, substance-abuse treatment.

Next in the pyramid is safety. I've had parents in reviews discuss being homeless and feeling trapped about being in an unsafe environment such as a “drug house,” where people are engaged in drug use and/or criminal activity. Even when they want to change their situation, their reality is that they either remain in such a place or the streets. If you're a woman, the streets could be a far more dangerous place than a drug house. It's not until parents have left such situations and feel safe that they are able to focus on other “needs” or services the court has ordered.

When you experience a problem in your life, what do you do? Who do you call? In order to avoid problems such as anxiety, depression, or loneliness, we all need to feel accepted and supported by others.

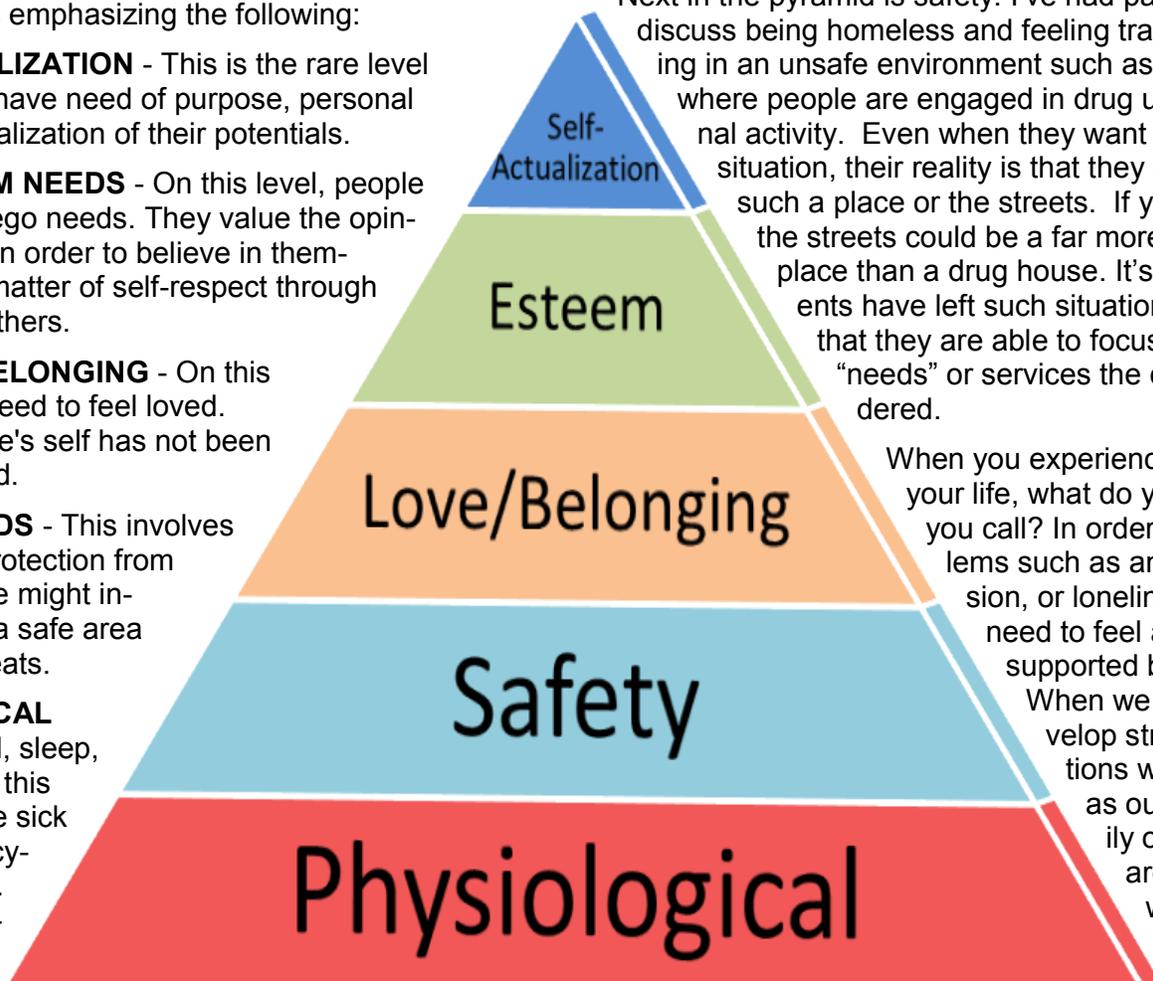
When we are able to develop strong connections with others such as our children, family or spouse we are able to cope with distressing situations.

What can be more distressing

than having your child removed from your care? We've all seen cases where parents feel supported and encouraged by their caseworker, and what a difference it makes.

Even when they are struggling and the caseworker calls them on it, and they genuinely feel supported and respected by the caseworker, parents are the first to tell you about their shortcomings and their desires and plans to overcome them.

This is why it is important for Citizen Review Board volunteers to inquire about parents developing support networks. How many times have you had a parent whose child has reentered care tell you that the difference this time is that they have not remained isolated, and that they have developed a support network?



Graphic: Terry Svay

Conference: “We want to know what we can do ... to protect kids.”

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young person’s life.”

If there was a theme to be drawn from the **Every Day Counts ... Conference** May 6 and 7 in Eugene, it was discovery. About 225 volunteers and child welfare stakeholders attended the event to learn new information and gain new perspectives on far-reaching issues facing children in foster care.

Shannon Rubeo said she’s attended all but one CRB conference since becoming a Washington County volunteer in 2004.

“They’re educational,” Rubeo said. “I always learn something new ... and that’s important because it seems like issues are always changing, especially this year with the (Oregon foster care system) coming under so much heat. We want to know what we can do as board members to protect the kids.”

Presentations and breakout sessions at this year’s event focused on topics ranging from differential response and case screening processes to how to model respectful treatment of youth who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning).

Jay Wurscher, Child Welfare Alcohol and Drug Services Coordinator for the state Department of Human Services, touched on the issues that the state’s legalization of recreational marijuana could have on child abuse and neglect. An addiction counselor, Wurscher opined that his experience with patients and law enforcement officials have revealed to him that drug is less dangerous than alcohol in many respects.

“On the other side, we have dead children in this country because of parental marijuana use,” he cautioned. “So while I can say it makes you less violent and causes problems of a different degree, if you have a parent getting stoned that much, they can’t care for infants.

“There’s a difference between an alcoholic and a social

drinker, and there’s a major difference between a stoner and a recreational marijuana user,” he continued.

Another eye-opening presentation, “What About the Dads?” featured fathers enrolled in the [Eugene-based Willamette Family, Inc., a health and recovery service provider](#). The three fathers were graduates of WFI’s unique “Dads Program,” a support and educational program for fathers in dependency cases going through treatment programs.

“I love DHS caseworkers ... but a lot of them have a lot of blind spots when it comes to fathers,” said Jake Spavins, a WFI supervisor and parenting coach, noting that there’s a tendency in service agencies to see men “only as perpetrators.” That makes it more difficult for fathers to meet standards to get their children back, he said.

“To just exclude someone from being a father, that doesn’t solve the problem either,” Spavins said. “We need to come up with a better system to get services for everybody.”

The three dads candidly discussed the mistakes made that led to children being removed from their homes, the months-long periods of being away from their children, the hard work they put into recovery, and learning how to be better parents.

“I struggled with it, thinking ‘can I be a parent to my daughters, are they better off without me?’” said Shane Wendland, who took part in the Dads Program. After working through his struggle with drugs and run-ins with the law, he’s now employed full-time, has reunited with his family, and has a house.

“Our case is closing in July, which is really awesome,” Wendland said.

To access other materials, videos and PowerPoint presentations from the 2016 Every Day Counts ... Conference, click [HERE](#).



Charity is a highlight of the Every Day Counts ... Conference. CRB volunteers from across the state assembled gift baskets for a raffle that generated nearly \$4,400 to support [Camp to Belong](#), which reunites siblings living in separate foster care homes in a summer -camp setting. THANK YOU to all who attended the conference. See you next year!



Photos: Terry Svay

Empathy improves outcomes for LGBTQ youth in foster care

We know that youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the child welfare system nationwide. Long-term outcomes for LGBTQ youth leaving care are markedly worse than for non-LGBTQ youth; About 40% of the homeless youth population identifies as LGBTQ, and almost half of that group reports current or prior involvement with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems.

At various points during their time in the child welfare system, LGBTQ youth interact with caseworkers, foster parents, group-home facilities, and other foster youth.

In these instances, they may experience discrimination and stigma unique to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression. LGBTQ youth are more likely to have multiple placement changes, higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, and education disruptions. And they often experience higher rates of depression, homelessness, and attempted suicide.



Molly Johnson
CRB
Field Manager

In his peer-reviewed journal article entitled [“Permanency for LGBTQ Youth.”](#) Gerald P. Mallon discusses the many challenges facing LGBTQ youth in foster care:

“LGBTQ youth have not always benefited from efforts at the policy and practice level to ensure permanency for all children and youth in foster care.

LGBTQ youth are still all too often placed in group care settings because of their sexual orientations or gender identities – environments in which they are at risk of significant threats to their safety and well-being, and where placement related experiences, such as frequent moves and running away, undermine their opportunities for permanency.

LGBTQ youth will not have the benefit of permanent families and caring, committed adults in their lives unless each individual who works with them – each case worker, social worker, supervisor, attorney, guardian ad litem, court appointed special advocate, judge, foster parent, adoptive parent, therapist, and mentor ensures that every youth is safe, affirmed in their identities, and free from abuse; receives the health, mental health, and educational services that he or she needs; and, equally important, benefits from concerted efforts to provide youth with a permanent, loving, and affirming family.”

It is helpful for CRB volunteers to understand the needs and challenges of LGBTQ youth in foster care in order to make meaningful findings and recommendations in their reviews.

By participating in trainings with your field staff, reviewing technical guides and resources through websites of organizations such as CRB or Foster Youth Connection, or attending our annual CRB Every Day Counts conference, you can gain a better understanding of LGBTQ-specific issues and how they are being – or not being – appropriately supported in foster care.

The LGBTQ Youth session at the 2016 CRB Conference provided [an overview of risks and challenges of LGBTQ youth](#), use of terminology and pronouns, and supportive programs by several presenters. Guests included Seth Johnstone, the LGBTQ Education Specialist for the Bridge 13 Community Education Project; Alice Johnson of New Avenues, Life Skills Coach; Kevin George, DHS Child Well-Being Program Manager; Lisa McMahon, Program Director of Oregon Foster Youth Connection; and a very special foster youth named Brittany, who shared her personal experience and spoke her truth.

Participants learned about current terminology and definitions of sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical anatomy; That terminology may be redefined periodically.

TERMINOLOGY		
Sexual Orientations	Gender Identity	Physical Anatomy/Sex
Lesbian	Cross Dress	Intersex
Gay	Transgender	
Bisexual	Transsexual	
Queer	Cisgender	

We learned that the gender binary system, a culturally-defined code of acceptable and expected behaviors, is not reflective of all people’s experiences.

We also discussed [strategies to consider in creating safe spaces and affirming homes for LGBTQ identified youth](#): challenging our own assumptions regarding sexual orientation or gender identity, and noticing where they are coming from; that an LGBTQ youth does not present a danger for other children in the home; that LGBTQ youth should not have unique rules applied to them in the home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as not being allowed to share a room or go on dates when the similarly aged, heterosexual and cisgender youth, are allowed to; and that maintaining a youth’s

In the news

THE NORTHWEST

◆ Problems facing Oregon's child welfare system that have been brought to light in recent months has increased the urgency for the Central Oregon Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to succeed, leaders of the program said in an opinion-piece published in the **Bend Bulletin newspaper**.

The CASA program is mandated by state law and entails trained community volunteers who become legal parties in court cases concerning abused and neglected children. CASAs investigate and advocate on behalf of youth. "There is a lot of pressure for CASA of Central Oregon to serve as many children as possible because we know that children in foster care with a CASA volunteer tend to do better over time in nearly every quantitative and qualitative measurement," said CASA officials Jenna App and Lisa Romano

in the piece.

App and Romano said that CASA of Central Oregon will serve a record number of children in 2016, but because of budget constraints "will still fall short of our goal to serve every child in need in Central Oregon." Approximately 82% of CASA's budget this year will come from grants and donations, they said. To read the entire opinion piece, click [HERE](#).

◆ The Oregon Department of Human Services recently heard testimony from child welfare stakeholders as it prepares to implement new laws for foster care oversight, according to a story on the **NW News Network website**.

Senate Bill 1515, which went into effect July 1, was approved by state lawmakers in March during the legislative session. It requires the agency to conduct more frequent inspections of foster care providers, strengthens the

ability of the agency to suspend the license of caregivers that violate state standards.

Lisa McMahon of Oregon Foster Youth Connection said the new rules are about more than just improving the current living conditions of foster youth.

"When they're 24, they'll be young adults who don't think they deserve anything if we don't teach them that at age 13."

The new rules will be specific, the story said. State Sen. Sara Gelsler of Corvallis said, for example, she wants to make sure girls in foster care have access to feminine hygiene products; teens at a now-closed foster care provider in Portland once had to shoplift tampons when none were provided for them, she noted, adding that officials couldn't force the caregiver to provide the products because it wasn't written into state rules.

To read the entire story, click [HERE](#).

THE NATION

◆ Advocates for Alaska Native children are cheering a new federal regulation that they say could help keep Native children from being removed from their communities, according to a story published in the **Alaska Dispatch newspaper**.

The new regulation, which goes into effect at the end of the year, is meant to provide more consistent and stricter interpretation of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act — a law designed to counter the high rate of Indian and Native children being removed from their homes and communities, and put into foster care or adoption with non-Native people.

The rule is the first major effort to put legal force behind federal directions for implementing the 38-year-old provision. Both Native organizations and the Alaska government hope it could change the way the child welfare system handles Native children.

Alaska Native children account for 55 % of the state's out-of-home foster care placements, though they make up only about 20 % of the state's child population. Nationally, Native children are 2.5 times more likely to end up in state foster care, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Click [HERE](#) to read the story.

THE WORLD

◆ UNICEF Philippines is conducting research and funding police training to help combat the country's widespread occurrence of online-sex abuse, according to a story published on the **UNICEF website**.

The Philippines has become the global epicentre of the live-stream sexual abuse trade, the story said. In some parts of the country, such as Mactan Island in Cebu, there are 'hotspots' where both webcam pornography involving adults and live-stream child sexual abuse are widespread in a village or local community.

UNICEF Philippines is conducting research on the issue, funding training for police and NGOs, helping to establish a national help-line, and advocating for stronger national policies.

"This has been going on a few years now, but we're seeing more and more cases," said Sarah Norton-Staal, Chief of Child Protection at UNICEF Philippines. "Increased internet access and cheaper devices have brought poor communities online. The standard of English is very high and child sex offenders have been visiting since the 1970s. To read the entire story, click [HERE](#).

Needs hierarchy: theory can give context to plight of families

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This is also why visiting their children is very important to parents. Some workers recognize that, in spite of their addiction, parents often have good parenting skills and are very appropriate during visits. I've had parents make the point in reviews that what kept them fighting through their addiction was the ongoing relationship with their children, and the desire to become better parents.

At the fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy is the need for appreciation and respect. People need to sense that they are valued by others and feel that they are making a contribution, say as parents. Participation in activities, education or treatment accomplishments, and personal interests can all play a role in fulfilling the esteem needs. Those who lack self-esteem and the respect of others can develop feelings of inferiority.

Think about the times parents have proudly shared with you their certificates of completion, whether it's from a parenting classes or substance abuse treatment: I have seen what a difference positive feedback makes when CRB volunteers, even while making a negative finding, recognize parents' progress, and encourage them to "keep going." Parents' efforts are acknowledged and they feel respected. Some have told me CRB reviews are the one place they felt heard and respected.

Maslow described the need for self-actualization as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." Self-actualization requires honesty, loving one's self, wanting the truth, and doing our best. Self-actualization is a continual process of becoming rather than a perfect state one reaches. In other words, it is a journey. We are witnesses to people's journey to become the best parents they can be.

I have simplified Maslow's theory, hoping it helps you see and understand parents' circumstances and struggles, as well as advocate for appropriate and meaningful services.

This theory also makes common sense. Lacking housing, facing health problems and other stressors, how able would you be to address addiction problems, keep appointments, and focus on developing and maintaining healthy relationships with your children?

Perhaps services should be prioritized. As the theory suggests, for example, a parent dealing with homelessness and diabetes would be more likely to succeed if those issues were addressed first. You could have a great impact by asking questions about housing and medical treatment options in your community, and follow up with appropriate recommendations.

LGBTQ youth: more challenges in foster care than non-LGBTQ counterparts

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confidentiality is important to building trust with a youth and decrease their vulnerability.

Because we know that LGBTQ youth in foster care have demonstrably poorer outcomes in comparison to non-LGBTQ youth in care, here are some things to consider in guiding your reviews:

- * Don't ask or discuss the youth's sexual orientation or gender identity out of curiosity, but if a preferred name or gender pronoun is indicated by DHS in the case plan, or through youth's permission at the review, use that name and pronoun during your review.

- * If negative responses by the family to the child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity led to their placement or were related to their placement in foster care, did DHS provide services to the family to work towards a safe and emotionally healthy reunification, such as counseling and parent support groups?

- * Has DHS made efforts to place the child with a supportive relative, or an LGBTQ-friendly foster or adoptive placement?

Has DHS considered whether a transgendered youth

is receiving appropriate medical services from qualified practitioners knowledgeable in healthcare for their specific needs?

- * Has DHS identified social support opportunities for LGBTQ youth?

- * Has DHS ensured the youth is being appropriately supported in school?

- * Is the youth participating in the Independent Living Program with a robust Comprehensive Transition Plan?

- * Has the caseworker consistently visited with the youth in the foster placement?

- * Has the youth received a copy of The Foster Children's Bill of Rights?

Want more information?

[CRB 2016 "Supporting LGBTQ Youth" presentation materials.](#)

[New Mexico Communities of Care — I Am Me:LGBTQ Training & Toolkit.](#)

New CRB Volunteers!

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