

*Every Day Counts...
in the life of a child in foster care.*

CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD
Oregon's Foster Care Review Program



2008 ANNUAL REPORT



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE



Oregon's courts and Citizen Review Boards 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 in this state, 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.

I recognize, however, that for the judiciary to meet these responsibilities to children, we must acknowledge that the nature of judicial work in dependency courts is different from judicial work in other areas of the justice system. To do it successfully requires consultation and collaboration with the executive and legislative branch agencies and their local counterparts. It requires judicial outreach to the community and it requires an understanding that dependency proceedings must rely more on a problem-solving approach than on the traditional adversarial process with which we are all familiar.

The Oregon Judicial Department's Citizen Review Board (CRB) program complements the role of the court. The volunteers in this program play a key role in assisting the court to provide oversight on behalf of Oregon's children, by bringing a community perspective to each case. They provide an invaluable service in guarding the safety and well-being of dependent children and in holding delinquent youth accountable. The judges and staff of Oregon's state court system value the unique role these citizens play.

On behalf of the Oregon Judicial Department, I extend my gratitude to each volunteer for the commitment, time and energy that each one brings to this important endeavor. In addition to reviewing cases of individual children, many volunteers have worked to improve programs and processes in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. They have served on local model court teams and played an integral role in the judiciary's efforts to develop and implement standards and best practices related to the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act.

This report provides an overview of the CRB's activities and accomplishments. Many of the strategies in their 2008-2009 Program Plan are shared by the judiciary. One critical action identified in the Judicial Department's Five-Year Strategic Plan is our branch's commitment to actively work to reduce overrepresentation of minorities in dependency cases. This goes to the very heart of our commitment to treat every child and every family fairly and equally. Oregon's courts look forward to collaborating on this and other strategies in the CRB plan.

Sincerely,

Paul J. De Muniz
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Oregon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the program responsible for foster care review in Oregon, the Citizen Review Board reviews cases of children and youth in foster care to ensure that a plan is in place, and that services within the plan are adequate to improve their conditions and circumstances.

In fiscal year 2007-2008 (FY 07-08), the CRB conducted 6,059 case reviews of 7,240 children and youth in the foster care system. This number of reviews is consistent with the demand for foster care reported by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and by the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA). Current rates of care reflect a change from the increasing demands for foster care following the state's last economic down-turn.

Our modest and unexpected reduction in cases afforded us an opportunity to make two key improvements in the program. The first is a commitment to sending our written findings and recommendations within seven days of the review. This is a significant improvement over the 21 days allowed by the Supreme Court Operating Rules. The court, DHS or OYA, parents, and other people involved in the case now have more timely access to this important information.

The second improvement is a consistent, structured, state-wide approach to conducting our reviews. In making this change, the Boards' determination of each legal finding is more transparent to those who participate in the review. The written findings and recommendations from the review are also more easily understood by those unable to be present.

In addition to the assigned caseworker or probation officer, we invite parents, the child or youth, attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), foster parents, and other persons providing services to the child, youth, and family to participate in the review. Boards heard from 21,812 of these participants in FY 07-08. Their perspectives contribute to a more complete understanding of the status of the case, which in turn supports more precise findings and recommendations.

The work of the CRB program is really the work of our 393 volunteer board members across the state. Their remarkable contributions are proof of their commitment to permanence, safety, and well being for dependent children; and public safety, accountability, and reformation for delinquent youth. In FY 07-08 these citizen volunteers collectively donated 50,149 hours of service to the state, in reviews and other improvement activities. This is a cost benefit to the state of \$978,405.00, and underscores that citizen review is a cost effective means of providing an objective perspective on how the foster care system is working for Oregon's children, youth, and families.

Every Day Counts... in the life of a child in foster care

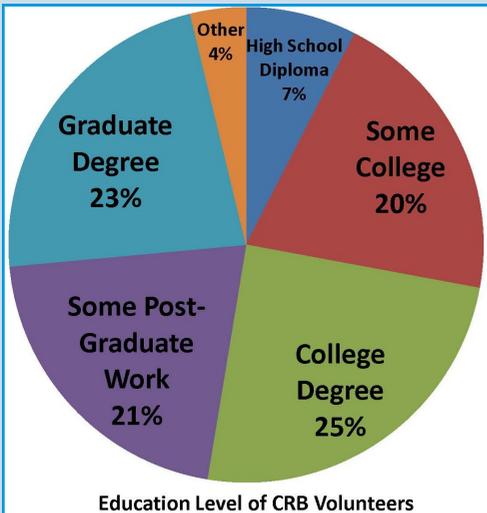
Ze've, age 8, has been in and out of foster care since he was less than a year old. Since 2003, he has been in 4 foster homes. Ze've wants a "forever" family. It is the responsibility of the court and the CRB to ensure appropriate efforts are being made to find him one as quickly as possible.



¹The Independent Sector, America's leading coalition of charities, foundations and corporate giving programs estimate that an hour of volunteer service is worth \$19.51.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

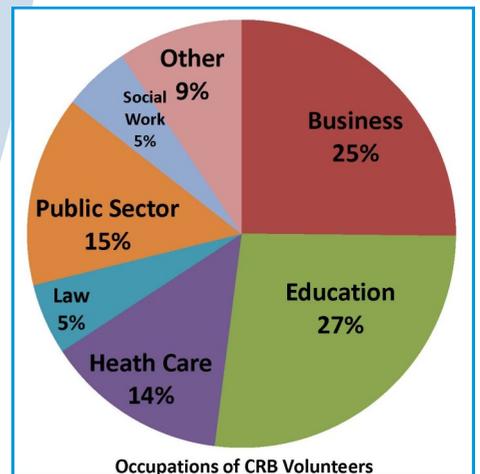
Currently there are 84 Citizen Review Boards throughout Oregon. Each review board is composed of up to five members from a variety of professions and backgrounds who are appointed by the Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court. They are selected on the basis of their knowledge or interest in foster care and child welfare.



CRB volunteers have a role that is more challenging than most volunteer experiences. In addition to understanding the complex legal issues related to child protection, they must comprehend the intricate social and clinical considerations that determine what is in the child's best interest.

All review board members receive training on key aspects of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, including agency policy and rules, and federal statutes regarding child protection. They are trained and supported by professional staff within the Oregon Judicial Department.

During FY 07-08, 393 volunteer board members completed 7,808 hours of training in order to improve the lives of children in care and to achieve



successful outcomes for Oregon's children. That is an average of 20 hours of training per volunteer.

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AGENTS OF CHANGE

Chief Justice Paul De Muniz presents "Agent of Change" awards to CRB volunteers at our annual educational conference .



Judith Spargo of Josephine County wanted to help find permanent families for children who are unable to return to their parents. She collaborated with other

community partners to bring the Oregon Heart Gallery to her community.

The Heart Gallery increases awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families by showing galleries of inspirational photos of children in need. Forty-nine families expressed interest in adopting, and 19 stated interest in fostering as a result of the Heart Gallery in the Rogue Valley Mall that was coordinated by Judith.

Jann Sparks, from Washington County, was honored for establishing and working with the Sparkle Fund, a non-profit

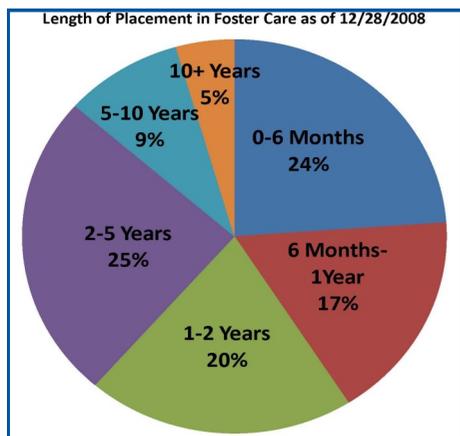


agency created to provide children access to important childhood markers like prom dresses and letterman jackets.

OUR WORK

Foster care is intended to provide a temporary home for children while their parents address the conditions that made it unsafe for them to remain at home. Every day they spend in foster care is another day without family.

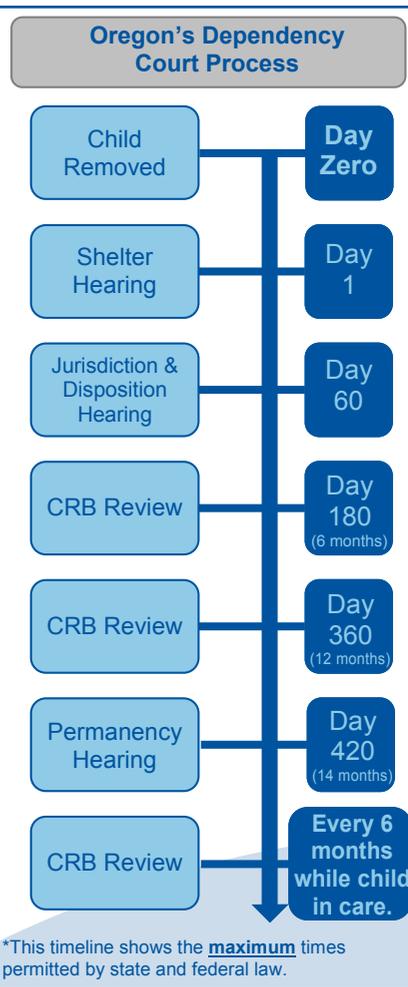
We are committed to making the children and youth's time in foster care as short as possible by conducting independent reviews of the cases of dependent children



and youth offenders; and by collaborating with other branches of government, partners and stakeholders to improve the foster care system as a whole.

This work directly affects more than 7,000 children and youth in foster care, their families, and other parties involved in the cases (attorneys, workers, CASAs, foster parents, therapists, etc.) Our work is conducted in all counties of the state except three (Sherman, Wheeler, and Gilliam) exempted by statute. In the counties served, all juvenile courts, juvenile departments, branch offices of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) are affected by the work of the program.

The statistics in the chart at left are limited to the cases of children and youth offenders that are reviewed by the CRB.



OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE COURT

The court is responsible for making the final determination regarding a child's need to be placed in foster care, and when jurisdiction should be discontinued because the child is able to return home or has obtained another permanent placement.

CRB, by statute, can conduct reviews for the court and make recommendations to the judge about the placement, plan, and services for the child, youth offender, and family. We assist the courts in ensuring that DHS, OYA, and others in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems meet the physical, psychological, educational and developmental needs of the child or youth offender, and preserve family relationships, whenever possible.

"This particular case can benefit from their ongoing oversight and review."
Judge Cramer
Harney County

PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to our review function, the CRB has been a critical link in local communities for Model Court projects. In partnership with local judicial leadership and other stakeholders, these projects implement reforms to improve outcomes for children and families in court-involved child welfare cases.

The CRB also actively partners with DHS. We participated in the Child and Family Services Review (a federal review by the Children's Bureau to promote permanence, safety and well-being for children in foster care), and in the development of the required Program Improvement Plan. We have also been involved in several of DHS' Rapid Process Improvement Teams.

STATUS OF CRB EFFORTS IDENTIFIED IN THE 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

Face-to-face contact between the assigned caseworker and the families they are working with is an essential factor in successful resolution to foster care. In partnership with DHS, the CRB continues to make inquiry regarding this contact a priority in our reviews. Face-to-face contact has improved from 68.6% in September 2006 to 81.1% in June 2008.

Quality legal representation is a key factor in timely disposition in dependency court proceedings. Unfortunately the quality of legal representation in dependency cases in Oregon and throughout the country is inconsistent. In 2007, CRB staff and volunteers received training by the Public Defense Services Commission (PDSC) on what we should expect to see in quality representation.

Services to incarcerated parents as a barrier to successful reunification, was addressed through relevant training for volunteers at our CRB 2007 annual conference.

Consistent implementation of the Oregon Safety Model, is a DHS priority. We have assisted them in meeting this goal by meeting with them twice to provide feedback regarding success and barriers at the local level. CRB also provided valuable information regarding documentation in individual case plans that was collected through a statewide survey of CRB volunteers and staff.

Relative placement is a legislative priority. DHS sought CRB expertise and perspective when revising letters sent

to a child's relatives. These letters previously looked only at temporary or permanent placement. They are now more engaging and focus on establishing relative support and connections as well as placement. CRB is also participating in two rule writing workgroups dealing with diligent relative search, and consideration of relatives for contact, support and placement.

Reasonable efforts by DHS to provide services in three key areas: finalizing adoptions, services to parents, and services to children were tracked again during FY 07-08. Data shows an 18% improvement in services to parents and a 14% improvement in finalizing adoptions in a timely way. However, boards made 42% more no reasonable efforts findings in services provided to children.

LOOKING AHEAD

CRB develops a strategic plan, to ensure statutory compliance, meet legislative intent, maximize utilization of available resources and support and benefit system stakeholders.

The 2008-2009 CRB Program Plan contains strategies to: improve the effective use of interpreters; promote age appropriate consultation with children

regarding their permanency plan; address overrepresentation in the foster care system; better coordinate court and CRB reviews; and improve delinquency reviews.

As we work on these issues, we will continue to track reasonable efforts to provide services. We are also expanding our data collection efforts to include early identification of legal parties and relatives, cultural responsiveness, and documentation of family-specific needs and expectations.



Crystal, age 10, has been in care since an early age. Having spent numerous school years and holidays with several different families, it's time she has one of her own.

CRB STATISTICS BY COUNTY

The table below presents comparisons on data from the 33 counties that the CRB serves throughout the state for the fiscal year 2007-2008.

County	CRB Reviews	Children Reviewed	Interested Parties in Attendance	Board Days	Average time per CRB review*	Average time per Court review**
Baker	42	39	162	12	33	25
Benton	41	45	229	12	40	24
Clackamas	338	386	1145	48	30	22
Clatsop	100	101	353	15	28	30
Columbia	87	128	274	15	30	36
Coos	189	212	676	29	29	8
Crook	38	43	135	10	39	31
Curry	50	50	200	7	30	6
Deschutes	100	120	384	22	43	11
Douglas	206	274	912	28	29	50
Grant	18	15	39	6	50	38
Harney	38	37	158	6	38	28
Hood River	29	34	111	6	28	14
Jackson	454	505	1807	56	31	16
Jefferson	40	44	113	6	36	19
Josephine	200	223	852	28	32	55
Klamath	279	288	1345	48	29	5
Lake	14	17	34	4	40	31
Lane	972	1149	3332	120	29	16
Lincoln	123	136	697	27	29	18
Linn	268	321	1371	39	34	20
Malheur	85	131	361	14	49	19
Marion	944	1167	2505	142	33	10
Morrow	19	23	49	6	37	***
Multnomah	385	496	922	74	32	35
Polk	182	209	791	25	31	9
Tillamook	31	31	123	6	34	28
Umatilla	145	171	520	23	35	25
Union	36	29	115	11	34	18
Wallowa	6	7	25	4	48	60
Wasco	75	84	313	12	31	16
Washington	432	594	1209	83	33	19
Yamhill	93	131	550	12	29	11
STATEWIDE	6059	7240	21812	956	32	20

*In minutes

**This does not include permanency hearings

***Data unavailable

Oregon Judicial Department
Citizen Review Board
410 NE 18th Ave.
Portland, OR 97232
www.ojd.state.or.us/crb

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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If you would like information about your local Citizen Review Board, or would like to talk with others involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice system, we encourage you to contact your local DHS, OYA, or CRB office, or visit our website at:

www.ojd.state.or.us/crb

Our special thanks to the "Heart Gallery of Lane County—a Family for Every Child," for providing the pictures of children inside this report. Their mission -" to find a loving permanent family for every waiting Oregon foster child" - is embraced by the 393 Citizen Volunteers in the CRB program. For more information visit their website at:

www.afamilyforeverychild.org

*Brendon
has spent two
birthdays,
and three
Christmases
in foster
care. He
needs a
family to
help him
cele-
brate
the next
ones.*

