

crb network news

June 2014

newsletter of the citizen review board

Every Day Counts



Children, education and contributions were key objectives at CRB Annual Conference

Standing at a podium before an audience comprised of child welfare professionals, experts and volunteers, Valeri Love summed up her feelings on their collective mission.

“I think everybody knows how important the work you do is regarding children and families,” said Love, Lane County Juvenile Court judge.

“Whether it’s (Citizen Review Board) volunteers, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), judges ... I think we all find the work rewarding, even though it can be heart-wrenching at times.

She paused.

“But for me, I feel like I’m contributing

something back to the community in a way that’s very profound.”

More than 200 people from across Oregon shared that sentiment at the CRB “Every Day Counts” Conference at the Hilton Conference Center in Eugene May 2 and 3.

The annual event, which began in 1988, provided opportunities for education and connections. Attendees learned about elements of case reviews, brushed up on developments and updates to juvenile laws and even heard testimonials from youth formerly in the foster care system.

Judith Hansen, a Coos County volunteer of three years, said the conference offered a chance to see the breadth of

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new volunteers

CLACKAMAS COUNTY

Dana Hisey, Laurence Spiegel

DESCHUTES COUNTY

Tamara Bender, William Gregoricus

DOUGLAS COUNTY

Katherine McManis

JACKSON COUNTY

Katie Forester

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Bart Carpenter

KLAMATH COUNTY

Kathleen Noonan

LANE COUNTY

Jackie Barrett, Susan Chapkis-Herzog, Peni Cotton, Lisa Ross, Eric Sternbach, Andrea Vedder

MARION COUNTY

Jill Jones, Heather Sinor

POLK COUNTY

Richard Fenske, Tracy Powell

UNION COUNTY

Connie Voelz

WASCO COUNTY

Amanda Barham

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Suhila Haidary, Suzanna Handley, Susan Kingham, Susan Nemchick, Angela Peene

Keeping relatives of children in foster care in the loop

The involvement of relatives in the lives of children in foster care is critical for children -- they need to have a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, and unconditional support. For children, knowing that they are part of a family and will be connected for life regardless of any other circumstances creates a sense of security during an often tumultuous and traumatic time in their lives. The single factor most closely associated with positive outcomes for children is meaningful, lifelong connections to family.

For children in foster care, finding, maintaining, and strengthening bonds with family members is



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one of the most important services that can be provided.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act established a placement preference for relatives when children need foster care placement. Oregon law requires that DHS make diligent efforts to identify, locate, and contact relatives in order to see if they are interested in being a placement resource. Additionally, family engagement is regarded as a best practice and is embodied in Oregon Administrative Rules and DHS policy.

In CRB reviews, we often concentrate on relative involvement in the front end of the cases, asking about the relative search and inquiring about the relatives interested in being a placement resource for the child. When children are placed with relatives, we may consider the relative search “complete” and not ask about other available relatives. Relatives can serve many different roles in a child’s life. If a relative is not able to be a placement resource, we should ask about other roles that the relative may serve. Can they visit with the child, attend school activities or supervise visits between the child and other family members?

While placement with a relative is important, it is not the only goal of an initial relative search. Once a case progresses and a concurrent plan is implemented by the

court, relative engagement can become less of a priority. Relative searches may not be restarted or continued when a case is several years old, and making Finding #2 can become an automatic “yes” without new attempts to engage relatives in the child’s life. This is a disservice to the children at the heart of the case, as we know that outcomes are better when children are engaged with relatives.

Relative engagement is important at the beginning of a case, but it can be even more critical once the permanency plan is changed to APPLA. According to a longitudinal study by the University of Chicago in 2010, 49 percent of youth who aged out of foster care in 2002 and 2003 were homeless at some point during the next three years. Forty-three percent school dropouts with a median income of \$598 per month, and 37 % had children of their own.

According to the Portland State University Child Welfare Partnership, 20 % of Oregon placements are APPLA. Of these, more than 22 % are placed with relatives, while 55 % are with non-related foster parents. Seventy-five percent of the APPLA population has been in care for three or more years. APPLA placements have certain requirements, one of which is an ongoing diligent search for relatives even if previous relative searches were unsuccessful.

Perhaps the worst outcome for a child in long term foster care is to leave care without any ongoing support or connections; to essentially be completely on their own at age 18 or 21. We need to ensure that these young people have a supportive network of people who will be in their lives once DHS custody ends, who will be there to attend graduation ceremonies, celebrate holidays, and provide long-term support. Youth who are transitioning out of foster care often contact relatives on their own, attempting to forge the family connections that they didn’t have while in care. Preparing them for this contact while they are still in care can help youth transition more successfully from foster care to independent living. Children and young adults have a right to their own information and it is always beneficial for them to work through this information while they have support systems in place.

Relatives: engagement needed for positive outcomes

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At the CRB Review, board members should always ask about the status of the relative search. Because DHS is required to have an ongoing diligent search for relatives, board members should ask when the relatives were last contacted. An Oregon Family Decision Meeting (OFDM or FDM) can be another way for DHS to involve relatives in the case plan. The OFDM is a family-focused intervention that is facilitated by professional staff and is designed to strengthen the care giving system for the child by creating a family plan. The family plan is a written document that outlines the family's recommendation on what plan best meets the child's needs, the expectations of the parents, and specific services that DHS will provide. Another way to engage relatives in a child's case is Family Finding. The Family Finding model seeks to build a youth's family support network by locating and bringing together a range of

involved and supportive family members rather than just one legal resource.

CRB board members can ensure that DHS is continuing the relative search throughout the life of the case, engaging relatives in decision making for the child, and providing the child or youth with an opportunity for meaningful connections with family members. As youth prepare to leave foster care, board members can focus on efforts to build the youth's support network by DHS and others. Relative engagement is important for children in foster care, and is critical to positive outcomes for children.

The Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services created a Facilitator's Guide for Working with Relatives of Dependent Children. The 3rd Edition of this guide was a valuable resource in writing this article.

CRB BULLETIN BOARD

A recent policy brief published by [The Future of Children](#) research organization discusses the different forms of adversity — from poverty to abuse — that makes children vulnerable to the damaging effects of chronic stress. The brief was co-authored by Ross Thompson, a psychology professor at the University of California and Ron Haskins, co-director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution. To read the article, click [HERE](#).

When parents are apprehended on immigration issues, children can end up in the child welfare system. According to the [Women's Refugee Commission](#), more than 5,000 children are in foster care because their parents have been detained or deported. To help alleviate the problem, the commission recently published a downloadable toolkit entitled "[Detained or Deported: What About My Children?](#)" The guide provides step-by-step instructions, advice and resources to aid parents — along with government officials, attorneys and service providers — in protecting and maintaining parental rights and making well-informed decisions. The toolkit is available in English and Spanish.

A June 23 article in the [Catholic Courier](#) reports from federal officials about a major surge of children from Central American countries attempting to pass over the border into the United States without being accompanied by a parent or adult. The net effect is a refugee-type situation, according to human services agencies and advocates interviewed for the story. More than 47,000 children have been apprehended since the start of the fiscal year in October. The Obama administration announced June 20 more than \$250 million in new and ongoing funding for programs in the "sending" countries for deportee assistance and other incentives to stay home. Read the entire article [HERE](#).

A weeklong sex-trafficking sting coordinated across 106 cities in the United States resulted in the rescue of 168 children victimized through prostitution, the FBI announced June 23. Operation Cross Country VIII also led to the arrest of 281 pimps on state and federal charges. "Operation Cross Country reveals that children are being targeted and sold for sex in America everyday," said John Ryan, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in a press release. For more information, click [HERE](#).

Helping teens and young adults achieve independence

The child welfare system exists with the purpose of protecting our most vulnerable and voiceless citizens. The Department of Human Services has fulfilled the greater part of its mandate when the agency removes children from abusive, neglectful, and traumatizing environments. When children enter foster care, the paramount concern is ensuring their safety.

But when foster children grow older and permanency plans no longer focus on reunification, achieving their independence may become the vital goal.

By nature, teenagers and young adults strive for independence as they seek to carve their own slice of the



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world. Being a foster child doesn't eliminate this innate desire. Yet being a foster teen does mean that there will be additional obstacles on the path to independence that most teens do not have to face. Children growing up outside foster care learn independent living skills through their parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, spiritual community and so forth.

Children growing up inside foster care see many disruptions in these relationships and may not receive the natural supports critical for developing independence. They may have no relationships with parents due to past traumas. They may have been separated from siblings years ago and have limited contact with them. They may have had several changes in placements and/or schools preventing an opportunity to establish relationships with their teachers, coaches and spiritual community.

In addition to fewer connections with people, foster teens also have fewer opportunities to explore independence through taking age-typical risks.

Example: It is perfectly normal for a teenager to want to stay out past curfew to spend time with friends. For a teenager *not in foster care*, a decision to stay out later

than curfew will likely lead to grounding or loss of privileges. For a teenager *in foster care*, the same decision could lead to a change to a more restrictive placement where supervision can be increased—further limiting opportunities for independence.

Another example: It's normal for a teenager to want to take a parent's (or foster parent's) car without permission. For a teenager *not in foster care*, a decision to take a parent's car will likely lead to more grounding or loss of privileges. For a teenager *in foster care*, the same decision could potentially lead to criminal delinquency charges.

And while most adults would not condone this type of poor decision making, part of a teenager's road to independence involves learning how to be responsible for all decisions, both good and bad. After a loss of privileges, the teenager *not in foster care* may start to understand the importance of delaying gratification and rejecting reckless impulsivity, thus strengthening his/her ability to be independent. After being placed in a more restrictive setting, the teenager *in foster care* may begin to see the world as harshly punitive or unfair, limiting their desire to take positive risks and lowering their aversion to take negative risks.

Teenagers also have less access to their "wish list." Items such as back-to-school clothes, cell phones or driver's permits may seem like inconsequential things to adults, but from a teenager's perspective, ownership of these items is a further step towards independence. These are rarely items provided to foster youth as part of case planning.

Alternatively, when teenagers and young adults start to clear obstacles, they also take healthier steps towards independence, including looking for employment, planning for post-high school education, and making better decisions for their well-being.

DHS offers access to Independent Living Programs to help teenagers and young adults achieve independence. And while these services are a good start, brochures, plans and subsidies can't, on their own, substitute for natural supports. At the "Success Beyond 18" conference in December 2013, several youth formerly in foster care involved with the Jim Casey Initiative stated what they needed to establish independence was help from DHS in

Annual Conference 2014 Photographs



Every Day Counts

That motto rang true for the 206 participants of the CRB Annual Conference in May. If you missed the event, materials and video recordings of some sessions are available [HERE](#) on the [CRB website](#). A highlight of the conference was the charitable giving it generated. Baskets filled with prizes and goodies donated from local boards across the state raised \$3,819 to support [Camp to Belong](#), which reunites siblings living in separate foster care homes in a summer camp setting. A HUGE THANKS to all who gave and attended the conference. See you next year!



Independence: try treating youth as partners in process

Cont. from p. 4

forming relationships. They felt supported when caseworkers treated them not as wards, but as partners, allowing them to participate in determining their future, and thus creating a relationship with the caseworker.

Essentially, the desired perspective shift can be summarized as follows:

- Is the teenager/young adult's safety the immediate concern in regards to case planning?
- Has the permanency plan been changed from reunification?
- If safety is not the immediate concern and the teenager or young adult is not ready to exit foster care, what should the case plan seek to achieve?

Answer: INDEPENDENCE.

How can the Citizen Review Board help? There are more than 1,000 children in Oregon on some sort of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement ("APPLA") plan. Board members often review cases with the teenager or young adult present. Keep in mind:

- Reviews should be conducted in a teenager/young adult friendly environment.
- The review process should be meaningfully explained to young people.
- The review should support a young person's full engagement and involvement in the review proceedings and in the resolution of case issues.

In many states, when children in foster care turn 18, they are no longer part of the foster care system, and many find themselves living alone, without support, resources, and guidance.

The [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) works to ensure that young people — primarily those between ages 14 and 25 — make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood.

For more information on helping teens and young adults successfully exit foster care, check out the *Success Beyond 18* issue brief [HERE](#).

Conference: "Like-minded people ... interested in the same goal."

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efforts toward child advocacy.

"You don't have any idea until you get into a room of 200-plus like-minded people that you are a member of a large group all interested in the same thing and with the same (goal)," Hansen said.

Attendees gleaned tools and knowledge to aid in reviewing a variety of dependency cases -- including sobering situations involving family members and child sex abuse.

Cory Jewell Jensen, a nationally-known expert on sex offenders, presented the keynote address on child sex abuse, and information about how to know when it's safe for a sex offender to have contact with children. Her presentation highlighted the fact that most child sex abuse goes unreported, and discussed the methods sex offenders use to manipulate children into not disclosing the abuse.

She presented research regarding characteristics that correlate with an increased risk of recidivism along with a "[Decision Matrix for Contact with Children](#)" as a guide for determining when it is safe for a sex offender to have contact with children. Even sex offenders who have successfully completed treatment may present a continuing risk to children, she said.

A portion of the conference was devoted to Differential Response (DR). Approved by the Oregon Legislature in 2011,

DR moves away from a one-size-fits-all approach to child protection by adding an alternative course of action.

DR will be applied to reports that do not allege serious and imminent harm, while focusing on ensuring child safety, said Stacy Lake, DR manager for the Department of Human Services.

Cases where serious harm is apparent, meanwhile, will remain on the traditional track, she said.

"If you have a broken leg, you go to the emergency room to get some care," Lake said. "If you have a sore throat, you generally go to the doctor."

"What we're talking about here is early intervention," she continued.

Donna Getz traveled to Eugene for her second conference. A Douglas County volunteer since 2011, Getz said it was her experience watching families in turmoil as a property manager for more than 30 years that prompted her to become a board member.

"It's very sad to see what happens to some families," she said. "The best thing about (the CRB) is when we have a successful outcome to a case ... it just lights up the room when we really see the success."

Story, photos by Craig Coleman, CRB Network News Editor