

2013-14 CAPTA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL REPORTS

One of the requirements of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) is that states create at least three citizen review panels (CRPs) to evaluate the extent to which state and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities. In September 2012, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) transferred responsibility for ensuring compliance with this requirement to the CRB. The law requires that panels prepare, on an annual basis, a report containing a summary of panel activities and recommendations to improve the child protection services system.

The role of the panels is to identify issues to explore, to review DHS policies, collect data and information, and make recommendations for system improvements. Panels do not implement the recommendations or establish policies or programs.

The CRB established three CRPs in Deschutes, Lane, and Lincoln counties. Panel members included CRB volunteer board members and staff as well as community stakeholders from child welfare, public defense, local court appointed special advocate programs, and others involved in the child welfare system. Panels met in Newport, Oregon on July 30, 2013 for a two-day kickoff session. Attendees heard from Maurita Johnson, Deputy Director of DHS' Office of Child Welfare Programs, about various "hot topics" within Oregon's child welfare system; and Blake L. Jones, Program Coordinator for Kentucky's Citizen Review Panels for a national



Attendees of the CAPTA kickoff on July 30, 2013

perspective on CAPTA and guidance on identifying issues for panels to explore.

Panels were then asked to brainstorm a list of system issues they were concerned about. Each panel prioritized those issues and selected one or two to explore throughout the year.

Between August 2013 and March 2014, each panel examined federal and state laws and policies; reviewed data and resources; and met with community stakeholders, including local juvenile court judges and staff, child welfare managers and staff, child advocates, attorneys, foster parents, service providers, educators, and business leaders to discuss system issues and review draft recommendations. In April 2014, each panel hosted a community forum to share their findings and draft recommendations, and solicit community input and recommendations.

The Citizen Review Panels would like to extend a warm thank you to all the community members who attended panel meetings. Your questions, comments, and support for the CAPTA work was greatly appreciated.

DESCHUTES COUNTY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Members of the Deschutes County CRP:

- ◆ Patricia Craveiro, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Kathrine Edwards, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Marcia Houston, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Kristina Knittel, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Joan Springer-Wellman, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Bill Wagner, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Patrick Carey, DHS District Manager
- ◆ Tom Crabtree, Public Defender
- ◆ Pam Fortier, CASA Executive Director
- ◆ Jennifer Goff, CRB Field Manager

	Deschutes County	Statewide
Dependency Petitions Filed	82	4,670
Children in Substitute Care*	170	8,770
CRB Reviews	129	3,744
Children Reviewed	186	4,830
No Reasonable Efforts Findings	15	202

*The table is OJD data from the 2013 calendar year except for "Children in Substitute Care," which is point-in-time data collected by DHS on 9/30/12.

Financial disincentives to permanency and workload of child welfare workers emerged as the two system issues most concerning to Deschutes County CRP members.

Financial Disincentives to Permanency

At the beginning of its work, the Deschutes County CRP focused on financial disincentives to permanency. The CRP raised concern that the statute which allows for payment of college tuition for foster youth inadvertently impacts their ability to find a permanent home. Specifically, if older youth leave care before their 16th birthday, they become ineligible to have their college tuition paid. While exploring this issue, the panel discovered additional, more pressing financial disincentives to permanency.

To better understand the supports in place for youth in care presently, the panel worked with the CASA program to gather information. CASA volunteers interviewed a small sample of 13 foster youth aged

14 and above to learn whether they felt supported as they pursued their educational and career goals. Survey questions focused on whether the youth had a mentor or strong support person in their lives, help with their schoolwork, a vision for their future, barriers to achieving their vision, and a desire to continue their education.

Of the 13 foster youth interviewed, 5 said they did not have a role model in their lives, yet all stated they have someone "in their corner" to support them. While most of the youth had a positive view of their future, only 4 attended or planned to attend college. However, almost all stated they would attend college if funding was provided.

Seven of the youth were not involved in independent living services. Of those 7, some were waiting for referrals and one was on the waiting list. For the youth who were involved, their opinions were mixed about the program.

Barriers to Permanency

HOUSING ASSISTANCE: Housing emerged as a much more pressing disincentive to permanency than tuition payments, which foster youth can access from numerous sources. Youth can access housing assistance payments until age 21 as long as their cases remain open. Child welfare workers noted that sometimes youth are so eager to leave the system when they turn 18 that they want their cases closed regardless of the consequences. One of those consequences is that housing assistance ends immediately upon closure of the case and cannot be reinstated, not even if the youth seeks voluntary services through child welfare until they are 21.

UNDERSTANDING ACCESS TO BENEFITS: Independent Living Program (ILP) coordinators ensure that youth receive written information about all education benefits available to them. Not all youth, however, are enrolled in ILP. For those not enrolled, child welfare workers are not required and do not consistently provide older youth with comprehensive information about benefits to which they are entitled.



- ◆ Oregon law provides support for “children attending school” if parents are divorced yet the state does not provide the same benefits for children in the foster care system.

- ◆ All children 14 years and older should be referred to ILP. Participants also suggested child welfare hold a yearly seminar for all children in foster care over the age of 14 to clearly outline the benefits to which they are entitled. Youth participation in this seminar, however, should be voluntary.

Workload of Child Welfare Workers

ILP staff also noted that there are common misperceptions that some youth cannot get into the program because there is a waiting list or a belief that the youth would not benefit from the program and should not be referred. In truth, there is not a waiting list and all youth should be referred.

Community Forum Feedback

The Deschutes County CRP conducted its community forum on April 3, 2014. The forum was attended by the local juvenile court judge, attorneys, child welfare staff, CRB volunteer board members and staff, court appointed special advocates, community members, and the press. Participants noted that there are many financial disincentives to permanency and multiple road blocks to preparing older foster youth for successful adulthood. These include:

- ◆ DHS pays a lower subsidy for adoption than the foster care payment. Relatives and foster families may be less likely to pursue adoption because of the decrease in financial support.
- ◆ Older youth are often eager to leave foster care and do not understand that they will lose access to housing subsidies once their cases are closed.
- ◆ If child welfare would consider changing the Oregon Administrative Rule that ends housing subsidies once a youth’s case closes, there would likely be an important ancillary benefit of reducing the homeless population of older youth and young adults.

In addition to financial disincentives to permanency, the Deschutes County CRP expressed concern that workload often prevents child welfare workers from spending face to face time with families. Results from the last two federal Child and Family Services Reviews note that more caseworker contact often corresponds with a higher likelihood of successful reunification. As a result of budget increases, child welfare will be staffed at 75% of the capacity they require to ensure workers can effectively manage their caseloads. This is an improvement from prior budget cycles, however, child welfare remains concerned about mandates on worker’s time.

The panel discussed that court appointed special advocates are mandated to do some of the same activities as child welfare workers (visiting foster homes; talking to foster children, parents, and relatives; and meeting with service providers, etc.). While all panel members, including the CASA Executive Director and DHS District Manager, acknowledged the importance of maintaining clarity of role and independence, all also agreed that some tasks were duplicative and efficiencies could be created by sharing information.

The panel worked with community partners to craft a pilot project in which court appointed special advocates and child welfare workers come together to avoid duplication of activities while still maintaining independence of each others roles. A focus group of representatives from the two organizations was held to identify ways to enhance

partnerships as well as conditions that might cause them to be less successful. Mutual respect, responsiveness to requests for help, effective follow-through, true understanding of roles, and an understanding that disagreements over the direction of cases may arise were cited as elements of successful working relationships. New volunteer inexperience, ineffective time management by some child welfare workers, and lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities were cited as barriers to effective partnerships.

Community Forum Feedback

Participants in the community forum noted that there are many ways that court appointed special advocates can coordinate activities with child welfare workers. There are current prohibitions, however, that make the most effective partnership opportunities difficult. These include:

- ◆ The inability of court appointed special advocates to transport children in foster care. Elimination of this prohibition would enable court appointed special advocates in Oregon to drive foster children to appointments as they do in other states such as California and Nevada.
- ◆ ILP staff do not know the identity of the assigned court appointed special advocate. If they did, ILP staff could better utilize court appointed special advocates to encourage older youth to participate in ILP and assist with transportation and coordination of other activities related to participation.

DESCHUTES COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **DHS provide all foster youth and their foster parents written documentation of the benefits to which older foster youth are entitled. Attorneys and CASAs should also receive this information so they can most effectively advocate for the youth they represent. The court and CRB should inquire at each hearing and review to ensure this information has been provided to all foster youth.**
2. **The Independent Living Program conduct a yearly, voluntary, in-person seminar for all foster youth outlining all the education and other benefits to which they are entitled.**
3. **DHS explore whether the requirement that housing benefits are eliminated once a youth's case is closed is an Oregon Administrative Rule and whether it can be amended to allow for a former foster youth to access housing assistance until age 21 even if the case has been closed.**
4. **DHS propose amendments to the foster youth tuition legislation to allow the use of funds for housing while attending school.**
5. **DHS and CASA work together to outline, in writing, ways in which the caseworkers and CASAs can coordinate activities.**
6. **New workers receive training, by DHS and CASA staff, about the role of CASAs and ways in which the relationship between the DHS worker and CASA can be most effective.**
7. **DHS and CASA explore the viability of a staffing between DHS and CASA early in the case management process to clearly outline how activities might be coordinated.**
8. **DHS and CASA work together to explore allowing CASAs to drive children and youth to appointments and other activities.**
9. **DHS provide CASA appointment orders to the ILP staff so they can connect with the youth's CASA.**

LANE COUNTY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Members of the Lane County CRP:

- ◆ Marjorie Biehler, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Wagoma Burdon, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Norton Cabell, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Ellen Hyman, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Stephen John, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ LouAnn Martin, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Barbara Newman, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Bev Schenler, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Roz Slovic, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Tricia Hedin, Public Defender
- ◆ Amanda Monet, DHS Supervisor
- ◆ Melissa Pistono, Defense Attorney
- ◆ Sydney Putnam, DHS Program Manager
- ◆ John Radich, DHS District Manager
- ◆ Julie Spencer, DHS Program Manager
- ◆ Christina Sterling, CASA Program Supervisor/ Training Coordinator
- ◆ Lisa Romano, CRB Field Manager

	Lane County	Statewide
Dependency Petitions Filed	583	4,670
Children in Substitute Care*	1,158	8,770
CRB Reviews	702	3,744
Children Reviewed	1,033	4,830
No Reasonable Efforts Findings	21	202
<small>**The table is OJD data from the 2013 calendar year except for "Children in Substitute Care," which is point-in-time data collected by DHS on 9/30/12.</small>		

Parent/child visitation for children in foster care emerged as the issue most concerning to Lane County CRP members.

Parent/Child Visitation

When a child is placed in foster care, regular contact with the parents and siblings is critically important so long as the child's safety can be assured. National research has shown that frequent, quality parent/child contact is one of the strongest predictors of successful reunification.

Beginning in July 2013, the CRP met with child welfare staff and other stakeholders multiple times to review policies governing parent/child visitation and their

implementation. At one of those meetings, the panel heard a candid presentation from DHS staff during which they indicated that the structure of effective visitation time is laid out in current child welfare policy, however, the internal mechanisms and working patterns of the agency actually govern practice more than policy does. This is due, in part, to reductions in funding that have occurred over the last several years.

For example, child welfare policy requires the development of a Temporary Visit and Contact plan as soon as the child is placed in substitute care. This temporary plan must articulate why visits must be supervised if supervision is required. Thirty days later, the child welfare worker is required to develop an Ongoing Visitation and Contact Plan, which is supposed to be updated every 90 days to ensure that visitation is becoming less restrictive as the safety threat to the child diminishes. In practice, however, there is no mechanism for internal supervisory review of the initial plan, which raises concern that initial plans are not updated. In addition, visitation plans are not typically included with documents submitted by DHS for CRB reviews.

Visitation Survey

To learn more about visitation practices and how they evolve over the life of a case, the panel created a 64-question survey to be completed by child welfare workers. The survey was quite labor intensive as many of the questions required workers to review their case files for specific information about visits that occurred during the review period, January 2014.

Ultimately, child welfare workers completed surveys for 188 of 200 randomly selected cases with return to parent permanency plans. This was a response rate of 94%. Of those responses, 103 cases met the criteria of 1) having a permanency plan of return to parent through the end of January 2014; and 2) the child not being in a trial reunification placement in January 2014.

The results showed that the majority of children entered foster care because of neglect (61%) and/or

parent substance abuse (also 61%). Just over half (54%) of the children were placed with relatives, and most of the remainder (37%) were placed with non-relative foster parents.

On average, children in the survey had 7.8 visits in January 2014, for a total of 15 hours of visitation. This amounts to roughly two 2-hour visits per week. While 43% of the visits took place at DHS, 54% of total visitation hours occurred in the home of a parent or relative. Thus, not surprisingly, visits tend to be longer when they occur in the home of a parent or relative.

This result is troubling when it is paired with how infrequently there are opportunities to update visitation plans, including moving visits out of DHS. Fewer than half (43%) of all visitation plans had been reviewed in the past 90 days and fewer than a quarter (24%) had been addressed in the last court order beyond the standard boilerplate language giving DHS authority to determine appropriate visitation levels. Additionally, only a minority of parents (33%) with a low assessed risk of harm had in-home visits with their children. It is, therefore, possible that more frequent review of visitation plans by DHS and the court could result in more in-home visits and more total visitation hours.

Survey results also showed:

- ◆ Supervision (70%), transportation for the child (60%), and transportation for a parent (53%) were each provided for visits in more than half the cases.
- ◆ A parent mentor or coach was provided during visits in 34% of cases.
- ◆ 81% of children who had siblings in other placements had at least one visit with siblings during the review period (January 2014).
- ◆ 93% of children aged 11 to 18 were consulted during formulation of the visitation plan.

Barriers to Visitation

Canceled Visits: Visits are sometimes canceled by DHS as a punitive measure even though they are not supposed to be canceled as punishment for a parent

The Lane County Citizen Review Panel would like to thank all of the child welfare workers and supervisors who participated in the visitation survey. The insights gained from that effort were invaluable to the panel's work.

failing to comply with a service plan.

Transportation: Parents must be participating in three services in order to receive a monthly bus pass. If they don't qualify, they can get daily passes but must pick them up at the office. However, if they cannot get to the office, they cannot get a pass.

Visitation Plans are Not Updated: DHS staff report that the very reason the child is placed in foster care establishes safety concerns, so it makes sense that visits need to be supervised at the beginning of the case. However, supervision should "step down" as the safety threat diminishes. Concerns were expressed that in most cases this does not happen.

Part of the problem may be that the request for supervised visits that is made to the court is pro



forma and the court order includes standard language giving child welfare broad latitude in determining the amount of visitation and level of supervision. Additionally, attorneys and court appointed special advocates do not routinely ask for unsupervised visits.

Technology: DHS encounters difficulties in utilizing technology to maximize the contact parents have with their children. For example, DHS only has one computer set up to use Skype for all three local DHS branch offices. The Department of Corrections also has policies, like fees for use of the videoconferencing equipment, that tend to discourage inmates from utilizing technology to visit more with their children.

Space Limitations: Space at the DHS office to conduct supervised visitation is limited. The panel discussed ways in which DHS could partner with community organizations to expand their capacity for visits. For example, churches are currently providing visitation space for families.

One CRP member noted that the United Way is an excellent convener and may be willing to bring community resources together with child welfare to explore options. The Lane County Safe and Equitable Foster Care Reduction team, sponsored by Casey Family Programs, is also focused on the issue of visitation.

Community Forum Feedback

Lane County's CRP held its community forum on March 21, 2013. It was attended by the local juvenile court judge, attorneys, DHS staff, CRB volunteer board members and staff, court appointed special advocates, community members, and the press. The panel received the following feedback:

- ◆ There does not seem to be an objective methodology to assess current safety threats. Conducting refresher training on the Oregon Safety Model might help workers apply more case specific and present-time criteria.
- ◆ While visitation guidelines are reviewed with all parents, more intensive pre-visit coaching is only being made available to approximately 25% of parents.

- ◆ Case plan documentation and court order language is often not case specific. Updating plans and methods to step-down supervision should be better defined so decision-making is case specific and consistent across the agency.
- ◆ Expanding the use of technology to increase visitation would be helpful on several levels, not the least of which would help increase visitation with children and incarcerated parents. Participants suggested that DHS appoint a single point person to work with the Oregon Department of Corrections to establish methods and safety mechanisms to increase visitation with incarcerated parents.

LANE COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **DHS and CRB work together to create and deliver interdisciplinary training on DHS visitation policy, including content focused on the importance of visitation and methods to assess current safety threats.**
2. **DHS expand technology options to increase parent/child/sibling contact including contact with incarcerated parents. Appointment of a single DHS point person with DOC would assist in ensuring development of a viable plan that could be implemented statewide.**
3. **DHS provide updated visitation plans to the court and CRB for all hearings and reviews.**
4. **The Juvenile Court and CRB consider visitation when making reasonable efforts findings.**
5. **CRB and DHS work together to create a 90 day review process to ensure that visitation plans are created and updated in accordance with DHS policy. This review process, whether it is internal or external to DHS would provide opportunity to assess all levels of case progress.**
6. **DHS expand partnerships with local churches and other potential partners, including resources in rural areas in Lane County, to increase opportunities for visitation in churches and other community facilities.**

LINCOLN COUNTY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Members of the Lincoln County CRP:

- ◆ Ned Brittain, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Diane Flansburg, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Fawn Hewitt, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Sandy Allen, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Steve Waterman, CRB Volunteer Board Member
- ◆ Jamie Auburn, DHS Certifier
- ◆ Angela Cazares, DHS Supervisor
- ◆ Carol James, CASA Program Manager & Coordinator of Volunteers
- ◆ Jeff Pridgeon, Defense Attorney
- ◆ Amy Benedum, CRB Field Manager

	Lincoln County	Statewide
Dependency Petitions Filed	101	4,670
Children in Substitute Care*	137	8,770
CRB Reviews	100	3,744
Children Reviewed	155	4,830
No Reasonable Efforts Findings	7	202
<small>**The table is OJD data from the 2013 calendar year except for "Children in Substitute Care," which is point-in-time data collected by DHS on 9/30/12.</small>		

Community engagement in the foster care system emerged as the issue most concerning to Lincoln County CRP members. The county is in need of foster parents, CRB and CASA volunteers, mentors, volunteer drivers, and other paid and volunteer positions.

Need for Foster Parents

In 2013, there were over 130 children in foster care in Lincoln County. About half of them were placed with relatives, therefore, non-relative foster homes were required for the remaining half. Unfortunately, DHS in Lincoln County does not have enough foster homes to meet this need, particularly in Newport and the Southern part of the county.

Barriers to Foster Parent Recruitment

Accessing Services: Foster parents report it is challenging to access services for children in their care. A foster parent navigator would be of help. The system is very complex and having someone help

foster parents navigate it would relieve some of the pressure on foster parents.

Receiving Complete Information: It is critically important that foster parents receive a full background on the children in their care. Children who have experienced trauma often exhibit behavior including severe temper tantrums and night terrors. This type of behavior may catch a foster parent by surprise if they are not fully informed about the child's background and experiences, making the behavior even more difficult to manage.

Foster Parent Training: Foster parents need ongoing training and want to be involved in selecting the training topics.

Information Overload: Foster parents describe the training manual they receive as being very large and somewhat overwhelming. Additionally, many online training opportunities for foster parents exist, yet all foster parents do not have access to the internet so they are not available to all.

Misperceptions About Opportunities to Foster: Some people interested in fostering do not think they are the kind of family that DHS is recruiting.

Fear of Retaliation: While DHS has worked hard to communicate that the agency is interested in hearing directly from foster parents, whether it be about successes, concerns, or needs; some foster parents still believe they may be subject to retaliation if they challenge the agency at all. This perception is difficult to eliminate, although the agency is committed to doing so.

Need for Community Volunteers

Many volunteer opportunities are available in the community including serving as a CRB volunteer board member or CASA, volunteering to drive for foster parents and children, mentorships, navigators, and respite care providers, among others. Volunteer navigators who could help interested community members understand all the options are needed.

A member of the press noted that the community must be made aware, and not just once in awhile, about the opportunities to help children and families involved in the foster care system. Agency and volunteer programs need to be relentless in their pursuit of community involvement. Keeping the story of foster children and families front and center in the eyes of the community might garner more success in community buy-in and willingness to serve.

The panel discussed whether it is possible to track the outcomes for children and families if more people in the community would become involved. For example, if there were more respite care providers, would foster parent retention be higher? If there were more places for safe and longer quality family visits, would permanency be achieved more quickly? Tracking these types of outcomes and reporting them to the community might breed success in getting more people involved. If people can see how they are making a difference, they may be more likely to engage.

Community Forum Feedback



Picture of the Lincoln County Community Forum

Various opportunities for community engagement in the foster care system were presented at a community forum on April 4, 2014. Elizabeth Platt, President of the Lincoln County Foster Parents' Association, spoke about the myths and realities of foster parenting. Representatives from DHS, CRB, and CASA explained both paid and volunteer opportunities. While few members of the public at large attended the forum, the presentations did excite those that did attend and assisted the panel in finalizing their recommendations.

LINCOLN COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **DHS review its foster parent recruitment materials and ensure that people can see themselves in those materials. Using the "22 Ways to Help Children in Foster Care" document, DHS, CASA, and CRB work together to write and publish regular and ongoing press stories about foster care and ways in which the community can get involved. Recruitment should create ever-present celebrations of the accomplishments of foster parents and community volunteers to excite people to get involved.**
2. **DHS work through the interfaith board to reach churches in the community and explore ways in which churches might be able to assist in providing space for visitation and volunteers to serve as mentors, drivers, and other opportunities.**
3. **DHS ensure that all foster parents receive complete background information on the children in their care. Retention may increase if foster parents are clear on the issues children are facing.**
4. **DHS explore creating a foster parent navigator paid or volunteer position and ensure that the person in that position is well equipped to guide foster parents in seeking services and supports. The panel recommends that DHS convene a group of stakeholders to define what is needed for the person in the position to succeed.**