



2017 ANNUAL REPORT

CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD

*Oregon's Foster Care
Review Program*



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

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Leola McKenzie

I always say my favorite season is fall but it is really spring that I look forward to most. As an avid gardener, spring is the time I get to install that drip water system, build that greenhouse, exchange those starts, and plant those veggies I've been thinking about all winter long. This spring is particularly special because my youngest will graduate from high school, and we have been making plans for her to move into her own place—something that makes me both excited and a little sad. When did my little girl turn into this beautiful young woman? What does the world have in store for her?

Those of us who work or volunteer in the child welfare system see over and over again, stark examples of how difficult this world can be. We silently ask ourselves, what's in store for this child, youth, parent, grandparent? And then, as we always do, silently re-commit ourselves to making this world better for them.

There is always something to be outraged about. I remember observing my first CRB review more than 20 years ago and immediately buying a bumper sticker that read "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention." I still get outraged, probably more often than I should (it's the activist in me). While this might cause some to throw up their hands in frustration, I feel consistently inspired to do more. To make this world better. And I feel this way, because of you—the 259 volunteer Citizen Review Board members and 29 Juvenile and Family Court Programs Division staff I get to work with and for every day. Together, we form a powerful voice in the safety, health, well-being, and permanency of children in our state foster system.

As many of you know, last year, CRB contracted with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE), an independent evaluation firm, to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of our program. We received the evaluation report in January 2018, and it identified both program strengths and areas for improvement. Among the strengths were that judges value the work of CRB; that foster parents are twice as likely to attend a CRB review compared to a court hearing and that when they do attend a CRB review, they actively participate; and that CRB reviews are conducted fairly consistently across the state, particularly when it comes to issues pertaining to the health, well-being, and permanency of the child. Areas for improvement include boards needing to: 1) increase discussion during reviews on child safety and the appropriateness/stability of foster placements, 2) develop a better and more immediate feedback loop when DHS does not intend to implement CRB recommendations, and 3) open lines of communication between volunteer board members and DHS line staff.

I've always believed that by actively engaging the public - as CRB members - we make the juvenile dependency system more transparent. I was thrilled to see that 97% of surveyed board members indicated that they learned a lot about the child welfare system from being a board member, and 37% shared that they had inspired another person to volunteer for an organization serving children and/or families or to become a foster parent. I love that as our program ensures state accountability for the safety and well-being of children, we are also increasing public knowledge of and engagement in the larger system that protects them. I'm so very proud of what we've been able to accomplish together! Your efforts are making a difference to vulnerable children and families in our state, and I look forward to working on the program areas that will enhance this impact.

Leola Mckenzie

WHO WE ARE

The Citizen Review Board (CRB) is a program within the Oregon Judicial Department that reviews the cases of children in foster care. The reviews are conducted by boards made up of volunteers from the community who are appointed by the Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court. Currently, there are 62 boards in 33 of Oregon's 36 counties and 259 volunteers serving on them statewide. Each board can have up to five members and two alternate members.

Transparency and Public Oversight

CRB was established by the Oregon Legislature in 1985 in response to passage of the federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This Act sets numerous requirements for states to remain eligible for federal reimbursement of certain foster care related expenses including a requirement that the case of every child in foster care have a periodic review at least every six months. States have flexibility on who can conduct these reviews—judges can do them, child welfare agencies can have an internal review process, and/or states can adopt a citizen review process.

There are obvious advantages to a process involving citizen volunteers. They are independent, bring diverse backgrounds to the table, and usually have more time to devote to reviews. They offer a unique, common sense perspective to foster care cases, and a

review environment that is typically less formal than a court hearing, often resulting in more meaningful participation from youth, parents, and foster parents. Citizens bring transparency and public oversight to a system that is largely closed due to the confidential nature of the cases, and helps ensure that system does not stray from the values it was established to uphold.

In Oregon, CRB and the courts share responsibility for conducting periodic reviews. CRB typically conducts the first and second reviews (at 6 and 12 months respectively), the court conducts a permanency hearing at 14 months that also qualifies as a periodic review, and then the CRB and court alternate every six months thereafter until the child leaves foster care.

Case Reviews

Most boards meet monthly and can review up to 10 cases in a day. Legal parents or guardians, foster parents, youth age 14 years or older, attorneys for parents and children, court appointed special advocates, and child welfare workers are invited to each review. Other interested parties such as service providers, grandparents, and other extended family may also be invited. During reviews, boards are required to make a series of legal findings. Following reviews, those findings and any recommendations are compiled into a report that is sent to the court; child welfare agency; legal parties to the case; and, with a few exceptions, others who attended the review.

Our 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.

Our Mission

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

We Value

A fair, impartial and inclusive review process.

Citizen input and advocacy.

Treating others with dignity and respect.

State accountability for the safety of children.

Appropriate and timely services for children and families.

A safe and nurturing family for every child.

Our Staff

CRB has 23 full-time and part-time employees. Fourteen are Field Managers responsible for coordinating local boards, staffing reviews, preparing the boards' findings and recommendations, and representing the CRB on local child welfare improvement workgroups. The remaining employees include six clerical staff, a clerical staff supervisor, a volunteer coordinator/analyst, and an assistant director. Most staff work out of two main offices located in Salem and Portland. Eight staff work out of courthouses located in Coos Bay, Eugene, Hillsboro, Klamath Falls, Medford, Pendleton, and Roseburg.

Our Volunteers

Volunteer Citizen Review Board members 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 learn the intricate social and clinical considerations that determine what is in the child's best interest.

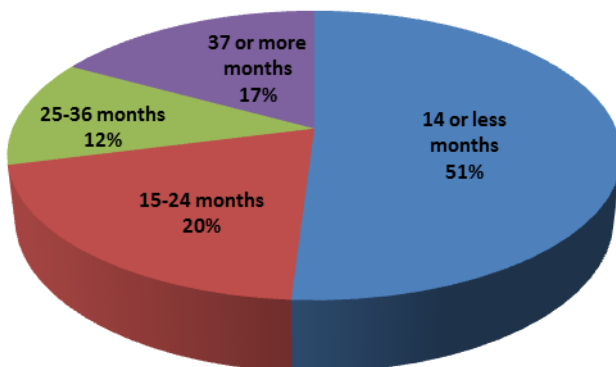
In 2017, 319 volunteer board members collectively donated 36,405 hours of service to the state preparing for and conducting 4,275 reviews of 5,250 children in foster care. Additionally, during 2017, these citizen volunteers completed 4,409 hours of continuing education on topics important to the cases they review. This is a cost benefit to Oregon of \$1,072,186.

The Children

In 2017, according to DHS' Oregon Child Welfare Data Set, 11,852 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. This same year, CRB reviewed 5,250 of them. It is important to note that CRB does not begin reviewing a case until the child has been in foster care for six months, so those who exit care before then are not seen by CRB. Additionally, CRB does not review children who have been returned to a parent on a trial reunification placement. Therefore, CRB has a unique perspective because it reviews only the children and families with the very highest needs.

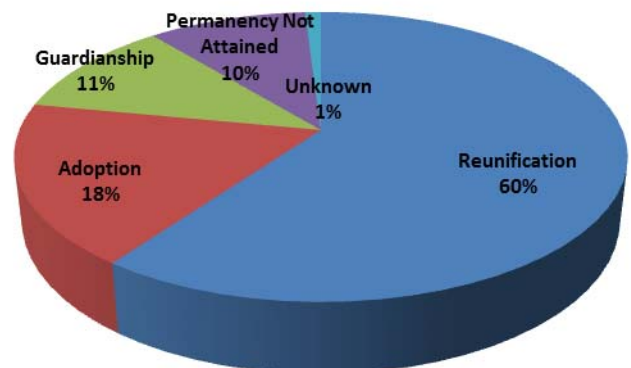
Demographics of Children Reviewed by CRB in 2017	
Age	
Under 5 Years	35%
5 – 9 Years	25%
10 – 14 Years	21%
15 – 18 Years	17%
19 – 21 Years	2%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
Caucasian	74%
Hispanic	15%
Native American	5%
Unknown	2%

Children's Length of Time in Foster Care at Time of CRB Review
(for CRB reviews held in 2017)



Data from CRB's Odyssey system.

Reason Children Left Care
(of children/youth who were discharged from foster care in 2017)



Data from DHS' Oregon Child Welfare Data Set.

2017 AT A GLANCE

A New Computer System

After three years of planning and development, CRB implemented Odyssey, its new electronic case management system, on December 12, 2016. Like the system it replaced, Odyssey receives daily data transfers from DHS. These data transfers enable CRB to track children in foster care and ensure they receive federally required periodic reviews. The Judicial Department also uses the data to report compliance with federal juvenile court timelines.

In the early part of 2017, CRB staff were busy implementing the new business processes and forms required in the Odyssey environment. Additionally, because the new system did not include a migration of data from the old system, CRB staff were tasked with manually updating case information for 7,651 children already in foster care when Odyssey went live. With the help of three temporary workers, CRB staff completed these updates on June 2, 2017.

Issue-Focused Reviews

On December 9, 2016, the 17 volunteer board members from 15 different counties who serve on the state CRB Advisory Committee sent a letter to Governor Brown in response to the independent review of Oregon's substitute care system conducted by Public Knowledge (PK), LLC. The review found, among other things, that space availability was driving placement decisions rather than the needs of the individual child, and that the pressure to find substitute care placements was compromising certification and licensing standards.

By statute, juvenile courts and CRBs have review and monitoring authority for the purpose of safeguarding the well-being of children in substitute care. In their letter, the CRB Advisory Committee shared that the seriousness of PK's findings also revealed that the state's CRBs had not been approaching their review and monitoring authority with the necessary degree of scrutiny and courage. They committed to correcting this, and to working with DHS and juvenile courts to improve the substitute care system.

In March 2017, members of the CRB Advisory Committee proposed a new approach to conducting reviews called "Issue-Focused Review." In this approach, board members are provided a technique for focusing their inquiry on the major issues of cases and for appropriately weighing the facts under each finding. The goal of this technique is to help board members confidently make the findings they deem appropriate in the face of sometimes intense and other times subtle pressure they might feel to uphold the status quo.



Washington County Citizen Review Board 2

Annual Training Conference

CRB held its annual Every Day Counts... Conference for CRB volunteers and stakeholders on May 19 - 20, 2017 at the Salem Convention Center in Salem, Oregon. Two hundred and twenty-five people attended the event.

The conference included a keynote address from Dr. Shannon Peak from the University of Oregon and Michael Livingston, a former juvenile court referee and former CRB volunteer. Dr. Peak explained how toxic stress from abuse and chronic neglect can effect a child's developing brain while Mr. Livingston discussed how to apply this information as boards make findings about the safety, health, and well-being of children. A third keynote speaker, Dr. Rita Cameron Wedding, professor of ethnic studies at Sacramento State University, discussed the impact of implicit bias on decision-making and how dialogue

about race and racism can improve outcomes for children.

Attendees also were provided a [demonstration](#) of an issue-focused review, which is now available on the CRB website along with a technical assistance guide. Other highlights included workshops on transition planning for youth set to age out of the foster system, measuring parental progress, making reviews more trauma informed, concurrent planning, opioid addiction, incarcerated parents, keeping kids safe in foster care, and the Indian Child Welfare Act.

For the eighth year in a row, CRB held a basket raffle during the conference to support Camp to Belong, a nonprofit summer camp that reunites siblings separated by foster care. This year, the baskets filled with prizes and goodies donated from local boards across the state raised \$3,600, which is enough to send seven children to camp.

Process and Outcome Evaluation

In April 2017, CRB began working with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE), an independent Portland-based evaluator, to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of its program. The evaluation was recommended by the National Center for State Courts in a 2016 workload study of Oregon's juvenile courts because they found that judges whose courts used CRB most frequently felt their local CRB was essential to their work, and that an evaluation of the quality of CRB reviews and their impact on outcomes for children would help "guide courts in how best to utilize and work with its local CRB."

By October 2017, PRE and a team of 18 volunteer board members and 17 CRB staff had observed and collected data on a day of CRB reviews in 24 of Oregon's 36 counties. Additionally, with input from CRB staff and the CRB Advisory Committee, PRE developed a series of online surveys for volunteer board members, child welfare workers, judges, attorneys, court appointed special advocates, tribes, and other stakeholders. PRE also interviewed eleven judges by phone to gather qualitative data to support and inform the quantitative data collected by the observations and surveys. PRE submitted its final report to CRB in January 2018.



Polk County Citizen Review Board 2

Cultural Responsive Committee

Every year, volunteer board members are required to complete eight hours of continuing education with one hour dedicated to cultural responsiveness. In April 2017, CRB convened a Cultural Responsiveness Committee composed of CRB staff and volunteers tasked with identifying training and supports board members need to conduct impartial, culturally responsive reviews where each participant has a voice that is heard.

The committee's first project was to conduct a confidential survey of volunteer board members about biased behavior they may have observed during reviews as well as how they think about and respond to their own biases. Partly based on the results of this survey, the committee determined training on implicit bias was a good place to start.

Implicit bias is an unconscious attitude or stereotype that affects our decisions. We all have them, and the best way to ensure that we control them (rather than they control us) is to become more aware of those we have and the situations that may trigger them.

The committee developed a one-hour training curriculum to provide information to CRB staff and volunteers about a common implicit bias (race), and to help them begin identifying some of their own unconscious associations that could result in implicit bias under certain conditions. The training includes listening to a Hidden Brain podcast called "In the Air We Breath" about how unconscious bias can affect a culture, and how a police shoot may say as much

about a community as it does about individuals. The training also includes taking at least two of Harvard University's online Implicit Association Tests on topics including but not limited to religion, race, sexuality, age, gender, disability, weight, and weapons. All CRB staff and volunteers were asked to complete the training curriculum by June 2018.



Josephine County Citizen Review Board 2

CAPTA Panels

In 1996, an amendment to the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandated that every state establish at least three Citizen Review Panels composed of community members and child welfare system professionals tasked with selecting and identifying an issue within child welfare and making recommendations to improve related DHS policies and practices. Each year, CRB selects three counties as sites for a panel. Baker County, Linn County, and Multnomah County were selected as panel sites for the 2017-18 financial year.

In September and October 2017, the panels in Baker and Linn counties held a public forum where members of the public were invited to learn more about opportunities and challenges facing the local child welfare system and to suggest ideas they wanted the local panel to consider for its area of focus in the coming year. In Multnomah County, a foster youth forum was held to gather ideas specifically from local foster youth; Independent Living Program providers; and youth and staff members of Oregon Foster Youth Connection, a statewide, youth led, advocacy group of current and former foster youth between 14 – 25 years of age.

Panels then met to choose an area of focus:

- Baker County and Linn County both selected recruitment, support, and retention of foster families; and
- Multnomah County selected serving current and former foster youth age 18 - 21 and beyond.

Each panel met two additional times to hear from various subject matter experts on their topic, review any related research and statistics, and to draft recommendations. A report of the panels' findings and recommendations will be submitted to Oregon's Child Welfare Director by May 15, 2018. DHS then has six months to respond in writing how they intend to incorporate the panels' recommendations into their improvement efforts. The report and response also will be part of DHS' annual Title IV-B progress and service report to the federal government.

Reimagining Dependency Courts

In 2016, Oregon was one of four states selected by the National Center for State Courts to develop and implement a differential case management system for child abuse and neglect cases. Called Reimagining Dependency Courts, this pilot program assigned cases to different tracks - Standard Track, Intensive Track, Expedited Track, Adoption Track, Guardianship Track, and Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative/ Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement Track - based on specific factors like number previous foster placements and criminal history of parents. Each track has a different court and CRB review schedule designed to help children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

Circuit courts in Clackamas, Deschutes, Lane, and Polk counties were selected to pilot the program from May 2017 to June 2018. CRB worked closely with these courts and the Juvenile Court Improvement Program (JCIP) to develop a process for coordinating CRB reviews with court reviews according to the timeline of the assigned track.

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

In 2016, Governor Kate Brown commissioned Public Knowledge, LLC to conduct an independent review of Oregon’s foster system in response to multiple cases of abuse of children and youth in foster care. The reviewers found the state did not have enough appropriate substitute care providers, and a more transparent and coordinated process for responding to abuse in foster care was needed. Discouragingly, they found that a number of reports and reviews over the last decade had also revealed problems with the system and suggested remedies, but little had been done to address these problems or implement the remedies. They said the culture of DHS and Oregon’s substitute care system needs to change.



Promising Initiatives

Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan

With input from community partners across the state, DHS developed a two-year plan in early 2017 to address the safety issues identified in the Public Knowledge review as well as themes from twelve years of Critical Incident Response Team findings, fifteen reports, and at least twenty-five sources external to the agency. This Unified Child and Youth Safety Implementation Plan includes 10 prioritized [projects](#) addressing issues like foster parent recruitment, worker retention, coordination of responses to abuse, and much more. To assure implementation, DHS resourced them with project managers and staff who are centrally managed out of

the DHS Director’s Office and dedicated exclusively to implementation of the projects.

CFSR Program Improvement Plan

About every five years, the federal government reviews all state child welfare agencies to ensure conformity with federal standards and assist states in achieving positive outcomes for children and families. Oregon completed its most recent Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in 2016. For each area found not in substantial conformity with federal standards, states must develop and implement a program improvement plan.

DHS determined that a fragmented system of response to abuse and incomplete or insufficient safety assessments and maintenance of safety conditions were the root cause of Oregon’s poor outcomes for safety of children in foster care. With input from community partners, DHS developed a Program Improvement Plan that included developing a standardized screening curriculum for reports of abuse, creating a centralized child abuse hotline, conducting periodic quality control reviews of child protective services assessments, improving training on the Oregon Safety Model and OR-Kids documentation, and developing a case note template addressing frequency and quality of caseworker face-to-face contacts with children and parents.

Governor’s Child Foster Care Advisory Commission

Oregon House Bill 4080 established the Governor’s Child Foster Care Advisory Commission to study legal and policy issues pertaining to the foster care system in Oregon, monitor accountability, recommend improvements, and advise the Governor and DHS Director. The Commission has nine members and is chaired by Deschutes County Citizen Review Board Member Bill Wagner.

Issue-Focused CRB Reviews

In 2017, CRB implemented a new approach to conducting case reviews called issue-focused reviews.

In this approach, board members are provided a technique for focusing their inquiry on the major issues of cases and for appropriately weighing the facts under each finding. The goal of this technique is to help board members confidently make the findings they deem appropriate in the face of sometimes intense and other times subtle pressure they might feel to uphold the status quo.

Challenges

Insufficient Variety of Placement Resources

Volunteer board members consistently echo the Public Knowledge review finding that too often placement decisions are driven by space availability rather than the needs of children. This includes children in need of specialized care from therapeutic foster homes and residential programs as well as children who simply need a foster family whose norms better match their own.

A challenge for DHS is that as the agency continues efforts to keep children safely with their parents, the complexity of cases that do require an intervention of foster care only increase. This requires foster families to be even more skilled at supporting children who have experienced complex trauma, and in turn, increases foster parents' need for supports like respite and crisis assistance. Additionally, whenever a foster parent makes the monumental decision to adopt, it often (but not always) results in one less family to call on to foster.

Safety in Relative Placements

In Oregon, 33.8% of children who entered foster care in 2017 were placed with relatives upon removal. In general, children who must be removed from their parents fair much better when they are placed with family. Additionally, the Public Knowledge review confirmed that substantiated allegations of abuse in care occur more often in non-relative foster homes than other types of placement. Despite this, volunteer board members are seeing enough anecdotal evidence of safety concerns in relative placements to cause them to question the adequacy of DHS' standards for relative foster providers—both

in how DHS is preparing these families to care for the children and then how rigorously they are monitoring them.

Recommendations

Increase Supports for Foster Parents

In 2017, DHS' Unified Safety Plan Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, Support and Training Project surveyed DHS offices across the state and compiled a comprehensive [list](#) of their ideas and current practices to support and honor foster parents. They ranged from gestures as simple as thank you cards acknowledging foster parents' extraordinary work to foster parent night out events, foster parent/respite provider mix and mingle events, child care during trainings, mentor programs that pair new foster parents with more experienced ones, and a DHS worker available for one-on-one support by phone or email during and outside of business hours.

CRB recommends that each DHS office ask local foster families what items on the list would be most helpful to them, and then implement the top item identified.

Recruiting new foster parents is important, but doing so without adequately supporting existing foster parents is like trying to fill a bucket with a hole in it. Any recruitment effort must begin with filling the gaps in local supports for foster parents. In doing so, children in foster care will be safer. And appreciated and well-supported foster parents can be DHS' most effective recruiters.

Detailed Documentation of Face-to-Face Contacts

When a child is in foster care, DHS is required to have monthly face-to-face contact with that child, and to have this contact be in the foster home at least every other month. The purpose of this contact is to confirm that the foster home is safe for the child and that the child's needs are being met. According to DHS' Child Welfare Data Set, in 2017, DHS met its monthly face-to-face contact requirement with children 89.9% of the time. While DHS is well on its way to achieving its target of 95% compliance,

volunteer board members are increasingly seeking confirmation during CRB reviews that this contact is in the foster home every other month and that it is of a sufficient quality to thoroughly assess safety.

As stated above, DHS has determined that one of the root causes of Oregon's poor outcomes in the CFSR for child safety were incomplete or insufficient safety assessments and maintenance of safety conditions. One of the ways they intend to address this gap is to develop a face-to-face template that prompts workers to monitor safety of children in placements and in their homes. The template will address the frequency and quality of face-to-face contacts with children and caregivers as well as observation of the child's living environment and interactions between the child(ren) and caregivers. Consultants will continue to conduct case reviews to ensure case notes templates and safety plans are used in a way that demonstrates frequent and accurate safety monitoring, and supervisors will review the face-to-face case notes during the required 90-day staffings with caseworkers.

CRB recommends that DHS continue with its plan to develop and implement a face-to-face template by June 30, 2018.

Including Out of Home Assessments in Case Material Submitted to CRB

Out of home assessments are comprehensive child protective services (CPS) assessments conducted in response to reports of suspected child abuse in foster homes or other substitute care placements. ORS 419B.035 states that DHS shall make reports and records from these assessments available to CRB. The Public Knowledge review stated that providing these records to CRB, as required, would increase the accountability of the investigators and DHS when abuse in foster care occurs.

After the 2017 Legislative Assembly clarified, through Senate Bill 243, CRBs authority to receive these records both when a report of abuse is received and when a report is substantiated, DHS integrated planning to provide these records in its Unified Safety

Plan Coordinated Child-Safety Centered Response to Abuse Project.

CRB recommends that DHS continue notifying CRB when a report of abuse or neglect in foster care is received, and begin including out of home assessments in case material submitted to CRB for upcoming reviews.

Volunteer board members take their job of reviewing the case plans and safety and well-being of children very seriously. They cannot effectively do this when critical information about potential safety concerns in foster homes are withheld.

Support for Relative Foster Parents

When DHS issues a Temporary Certificate of Approval to immediately place a child with a relative, that relative foster provider has 30 days to complete the foster parent orientation and one year to complete the 24 hours of Foundations training. Additionally, DHS has 90 days to develop a written, individualized foster parent training plan specific to meeting the needs of the child or young adult.

Because it could be some time before a relative foster parent attends the Foundations training and because, in general, for a variety of reasons, relatives are less likely to access community supports for foster parents, CRB recommends that written, individualized training plans for relative foster parents include help connecting the relative to a network of support for advice, comradery, tangible support, and respite.

SPOTLIGHT ON PERMANENCY

Introduction

“Permanency” is not a word you hear very often unless you work or volunteer in the child welfare system. And then, it becomes something you think about almost daily. Permanency is a legally established relationship of emotional attachment between a child and caregiver that permanently binds that child to family and culture. It is intended to last a lifetime. For children in foster care, reunification with a parent is the preferred method of achieving permanency. When this cannot happen safely or timely, other forms of permanency are pursued—adoption, guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement (in that order). According to DHS’ Oregon Child Welfare Data Set, of the children who entered foster care statewide in 2015, 39.4% achieved permanency within 12 months (the national standard is greater than or equal to 40.5%).

Promising Initiatives

Re-imagining Dependency Courts

In 2016, Oregon was one of four states selected by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to pilot a Reimagining Dependency Courts Project to develop and implement court policies and practices that reduce the number of children in foster care and improve permanency outcomes. Part of this effort included a file review of 200 cases of children in care for more than two years (“long stayers”) in three Oregon counties – Multnomah, Lincoln, and Yamhill. This review was completed in February 2017.

The other piece of this effort was development and implementation of a differential case management model for dependency cases that in 2017, was piloted in four Oregon circuit courts – Clackamas, Deschutes, Lane, and Polk. The model uses predictive analytics based on parents’ prior court involvement to assign dependency cases to either a standard, intensive, or expedited review track. Specialized review tracks were also developed for cases with permanency plans

of adoption, guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, and another planned permanent living arrangement.

The Oregon Judicial Department’s Juvenile Court Improvement Program (JCIP) has been coordinating the Re-imagining Dependency Courts Project in partnership with NCSC and the four pilot courts. JCIP will be contracting with an independent evaluator to conduct a process evaluation of the project before the 2019 Oregon Legislative Assembly.

CFSR Program Improvement Plan

In addition to child safety, the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) identified timely permanency for children as an area needing improvement in Oregon. The CFSR found that staff turnover, lack of parental engagement, and lack of timely documentation of permanency plans in the case records contributed to delays in permanency. Subsequent analysis of CFSR data also pointed to a need for additional foster homes, increased support for relative and non-relative foster families, and more residential treatment beds.

DHS’ Program Improvement Plan intends to address these issues through:

- Developing and implementing caseworker and supervisor permanency practice improvement tools;
- Creating strategic plans based on best practice, beginning in identified districts and continuing in phased implementation across the state;
- Increasing adoption finalization within 12 months of termination of parental rights;
- Increasing fidelity to Oregon’s practice model throughout the life of the case;
- Increasing the placement resource capacity for all children;

- Strengthening the support for certified families; and
- Ensuring early establishment and evaluation of permanency goals.

The Program Improvement Plan identifies multiple specific activities under each of these broad improvement strategies as well as how DHS will measure success and sustain practice, and the expected impact of each strategy. Also, JCIP will be partnering with DHS on a number of the activities. JCIP staff will serve on the workgroup that will identify DHS districts to develop a local strategic plan to improve permanency and create a template for these plans. JCIP will also be involved in a project to improve court and CRB oversight of adoption processes. In this project, DHS will begin submitting adoption tracking materials to the court and CRB for upcoming reviews. JCIP is responsible for training judges, CRBs, and other stakeholders about the adoption process; how to assess tracking materials submitted by DHS; and potential questions to ask during reviews.

Oregon Foster Children’s Sibling Bill of Rights

Prior to the 2017 Oregon Legislative Assembly, a statewide, youth-led advocacy group of current and former foster youth called Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) presented a policy recommendation to lawmakers and service providers to establish rights protecting sibling relationships of children and youth who are or have been in the foster system. The policy recommendation became House Bill 2216, Oregon Foster Children’s Sibling Bill of Rights. With strong advocacy from OFYC youth, the bill passed unanimously or near-unanimously in both the House and Senate, and was signed into law on May 17, 2017.

Among the rights included in the bill are:

- To obtain substitute care placements together whenever safe and appropriate;
- To maintain contact and visits with siblings;



- To be placed with foster parents and caseworkers who have been provided with training on the importance of sibling relationships;
- To ensure that contact with siblings will be encouraged in any adoptive or guardianship placement, as safe and appropriate; and
- To be immediately and timely notified of placement changes or catastrophic events affecting a sibling, as safe and appropriate.

LIFE Program

The Leveraging Intensive Family Engagement (LIFE) program is an intervention modeled after the partnership between the Morrison Center in Portland and DHS, focused on addressing gaps and challenges central to reducing the time to permanency for high risk children. It includes four key features:

- Family Finding to identify and engage family,
- Case planning meetings informed by child and family voice,
- Peer parent mentors to help parents engage in services and navigate the system, and
- Collaborative team planning between service providers involved with the case.

LIFE started in Jackson and Josephine counties in 2015 and has since expanded to Clackamas and Marion counties.

Legal Representation for DHS

In 2015, the Oregon Legislative Assembly established an 18-member Task Force on Legal Representation in Childhood Dependency to recommend models for legal representation in juvenile court proceedings that will improve outcomes for children and parents. The task force completed their [work](#) in July 2016 and found, among other things, that inconsistent state and agency representation models, a lack of uniform practice, and complicated financial models pose a challenge to timely and effective case planning and case management. To address this finding, the task force recommended full legal representation for DHS in dependency cases. Partly based on the findings and recommendations of this task force, the 2017 Oregon Legislative Assembly allocated funding for 35 permanent full-time positions within the Department of Justice to phase in full representation of DHS in dependency proceedings.

Challenges

One Size Does Not Fit All

Oregon Revised Statute 419B.343 directs DHS to include in the case plan appropriate services to allow the parent the opportunity to adjust the parent's circumstances, conduct or conditions to make it possible for the ward to safely return home within a reasonable time. The law also directs DHS to incorporate the perspective of the ward and the family and, whenever possible, allows the family to assist in designing its own service programs, based on an assessment of the family's needs and the family's solutions and resources for change.

Volunteer board members, particularly those from rural counties, have been observing too many instances where the focus of case planning appears to be on making timely referrals for services rather than developing plans that are tailored to the family, include their perspective, and creatively incorporate services that are immediately available because a timely referral to a service with a six-week waitlist is not a timely service. When the services available in a community are out of sync with demand, caseworkers need more flexibility to access alternative and/or out of county providers.

Concurrent Planning

The concurrent plan is an alternate permanency plan that DHS is required to develop simultaneously with a plan of reunification with a parent. It is the backup plan should timely reunification no longer be viable and, in most cases, the concurrent plan is adoption.

Volunteer board members consistently express concern that concurrent planning too often appears hollow in the first six months of the case. This comes from caseworkers describing their efforts to develop the concurrent plan with just the name of a relative who wants to be a permanent resource or simply that the relative search is ongoing. Volunteer board members also wonder how comprehensive concurrent planning can be when parents appear to not know what it is or when caseworkers respond to inquiries by reminding the board that this is a reunification case.

Assessing Parental Progress

During CRB reviews, boards are required to make a finding about whether the parents have made sufficient progress to make it possible for the child to safely return home. This finding has always been challenging for volunteer board members because they argue the language of the finding appears to be asking if the parents have made sufficient progress for the children to be returned today.

CRB instructs volunteers that this finding is asking them to assess the parents rate of progress and whether this rate will make reunification possible within the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines. This instruction has caused confusion among volunteer board members and CRB staff, and increasing concerns about consistency in how boards across the state are assessing parental progress. There are also concerns that for some children, providing about a year for parents to achieve reunification is not reasonable given the child's emotional and developmental needs and ability to form and maintain lasting attachments.

Recommendations

Flexible, Family Designed Case Planning

To address CRB concerns about timely referrals being the focus of case planning rather than developing plans that are tailored to the family, include their perspective, and creatively incorporate services that are immediately available, CRB recommends the following:

DHS should increase use of the Oregon Family Decision Meetings (OFDM) early in the case—between 30 and 60 days after placement. Also, when services available in a community are out of sync with demand, caseworkers should have flexibility to access alternative and/or out of county providers.

Comprehensive Concurrent Planning

DHS' Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan intends to address efforts around concurrent planning through development and implementation of caseworker and supervisor permanency practice improvement tools. Caseworkers will have a tool to prepare for and guide their interaction with families, and supervisors will have a tool that describes what to cover in each 90-day staffing with caseworkers.

In light of the work that has already been done, CRB recommends that DHS continue with its plan to develop and implement caseworker and supervisor permanency practice improvement tools that will address, among other things, efforts around concurrent planning.

CRB will partner with local DHS offices to ensure volunteer board members receive training on the new DHS practice improvement tools.



Clarity on CRB's Parental Progress Finding

To address confusion and concerns about consistency when boards are assessing parental progress, CRB will instruct volunteer board members to follow a two step process when assessing parental progress:

- First, board members should determine what the “reasonable time” is for the child in the case given the child’s emotional and developmental needs and ability to form and maintain lasting attachments.
- Second, volunteer board members should ask and answer the question—Given the parent’s current and expected rate of progress, will further efforts by DHS and the parent permit the child to return safely home within a reasonable time?

SPOTLIGHT ON WELL-BEING

Introduction

Recent years have brought increased focus on the well-being needs of children in foster care. Child well-being can be difficult to assess as it includes objective measures like physical health and academic success as well as more subjective indicators like self-esteem and connectedness. Well-being goes beyond safety and permanency as it looks at all the other things that bring quality to children's lives.

Promising Initiatives

Senate Bill 20

The 2017 Oregon Legislative Assembly passed Senate Bill 20 to bring Oregon law into compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The bill requires children in foster care be maintained in their school of origin - the school that the child attended prior to entry into foster care, or the school attended prior to a foster placement change - and that transportation to the school be provided free of charge. DHS may only move a child to a different school if the juvenile court makes a determination that it is not in the best interest of the child to attend his or her school of origin.

New Youth Transition Planning Policies

In 2017, DHS updated its youth transition planning and Independent Living Program (ILP) policies and procedures to increase youth engagement. The new [model](#) breaks transition planning up into four steps:

Step 1—Transition Readiness Discussion Guide. This guide promotes an in-depth conversational approach to assessing youth awareness, knowledge, and experience in various transition domains based on federal categories for ILP services and additional state categories for personal growth, social development, transportation, and other life skills. The guide is to be completed over multiple informal meetings between the youth and caseworker or ILP worker.

Step 2—Youth Assessment Summary. In this document, the youth and caseworker or ILP worker identify the youth's stages of readiness in each transition domain based on the discussions in Step 1.

Step 3—Youth Transition Plan. The plan identifies the youths current status, long-term priorities, and short-term priorities in specific categories under each transition domain. The youth should be involved in development of this plan—usually done during a Youth Decision Meeting—and the plan should focus on only a few domains at a time.

Step 4—Independent Living Service Planning Checklist. This checklist shows the topics or skills within each domain the youth should be familiar with prior to exiting care. The youth and caseworker or ILP worker can use the checklist to track the transition services provided to the youth as well as life skills the youth has acquired in other ways.

The caseworker or ILP worker has 90 days to complete Steps 1—3. The Youth Assessment Summary (Step 2) and Youth Transition Plan (Step 3) should then be updated every six months. State law requires transition planning to begin at age 14. Because youth don't become eligible for ILP until age 16, the caseworker is responsible for completing the steps until the youth is enrolled in ILP.

CFSR Program Improvement Plan

In addition to child safety and permanency, the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) identified child well-being as an area needing improvement in Oregon. Analysis of CFSR data revealed many youth in Oregon experience unstable placements that are more vulnerable to transforming into unsafe settings. DHS' Program Improvement Plan intends to address this through development of an infrastructure to ensure caregivers receive adequate training. In August 2017, DHS updated their training website for prospective and current foster families. DHS also plans to analyze the current training program budget, compare and contrast it against national trends, and determine whether

Oregon’s training funds are being utilized in the most efficient way. Training records will be consolidated into one area and DHS will conduct an annual foster parent survey to be completed in the winter of 2018.

Every Child

[Every Child](#) is a statewide initiative to create easy “on ramps” for people to help children in foster care and support the caseworkers who serve them. The initiative is currently operating in 13 counties and hopes to be in every Oregon county by 2022.

Every Child is run by a local non-profit in each county. Some of the on ramps that it coordinates include creating welcome boxes for children entering foster care, launch boxes for youth aging out of foster care, office buddies for children awaiting placement, transportation to visits, service projects (visit room makeovers, cloths closets, etc.), and events to express gratitude to DHS staff who’ve committed their lives to caring for children and families in crisis.

Recruiting Affirming Foster Homes for LGBTQ Youth

In a 2017 Street Roots [article](#), author Emily Green described DHS’ efforts to reach out to Oregon’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community in search of affirming foster homes for LGBTQ youth. In the article, Kari King, Chair of DHS’ PRIDE Employee Resource Group, said that Oregon has about two times as many LGBTQ-identified youth in foster care than in the general population. She also said a 2014 Williams Institute study of foster youth in Los Angeles found that LGBTQ youth have a higher average number of foster care placements and are more likely to be living in a group home. The youth in the study reported being treated less well by the child welfare system, and were more likely to have experienced hospitalization for emotional reasons and homelessness.

In October 2016, DHS and Multnomah County’s [LGBTQ Workgroup](#) hosted an LGBTQ affirming foster parent recruitment event. In May and June 2017, they partnered again to deliver a training series on best practices in serving LGBTQ youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Also in June

2017, DHS staffed an adoption and fostering information booth during the Pride Northwest celebration in Portland.

Challenges

Mental Health Services for Children

Volunteer board members are concerned that there seems to be a one size fits all approach to mental health services for children in foster care and that it is usually described during CRB reviews simply as “Johnny goes to counseling once a week.” They are concerned that too often, they see that the counselor is solely responsible for the child’s mental health when it should be a team approach involving everyone who has contact with the child, particularly the foster parent.

Lack of Caseworker Involvement in Transition Planning

Even when ILP is taking the lead on transition planning, caseworkers have a responsibility to be at the table along with the rest of a youth’s support team to help the youth achieve his or her goals. In spite of this requirement, volunteer board members report sometimes observing a lack of awareness among caseworkers of what is in youths’ comprehensive transition plans. It appears that when youth enroll in ILP, some caseworkers cease to remain involved in transition planning activities.

Recommendations

To address the above challenges, CRB recommends that DHS identify ways caseworkers can include foster parents and others in children’s mental health treatment. DHS also should reiterate the expectation that caseworkers remain involved in transition planning when youth are enrolled in ILP.

CRB STATEWIDE STATISTICS 2017 CALENDAR YEAR

COUNTY	CRB REVIEWS		CHILDREN REVIEWED **	BOARD DAYS	AVERAGE MINUTES PER CRB REVIEW	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS ***
	2016	2017 (*)				
Baker	33	34 (+1)	39	10	34	3
Benton	25	39 (+14)	48	6	39	5
Clackamas	107	185 (+78)	201	35	34	13
Clatsop	49	67 (+18)	73	12	37	6
Columbia	138	135 (-3)	166	21	38	3
Coos	143	193 (+50)	224	25	37	9
Crook/Jefferson	80	80 (0)	96	12	36	4
Curry	27	34 (+7)	45	6	41	4
Deschutes	146	187 (+41)	188	23	34	9
Douglas	196	277 (+81)	391	38	39	10
Grant/Harney	16	49 (+33)	53	6	39	2
Hood River	12	13 (+1)	22	5	43	3
Jackson	251	349 (+98)	486	48	39	20
Josephine	155	181 (+26)	228	27	38	8
Klamath	206	218 (+12)	255	36	29	12
Lake	18	23 (+5)	28	4	32	6
Lane	672	872 (+200)	991	107	32	45
Lincoln	77	123 (+46)	143	25	39	9
Linn	119	141 (+22)	181	23	37	8
Malheur	72	84 (+12)	119	13	32	4
Marion	281	348 (+67)	440	64	41	18
Multnomah	73	71 (-2)	89	23	41	8
Polk	59	86 (+27)	91	20	38	10
Tillamook	20	34 (+14)	37	6	36	3
Umatilla/Morrow	93	101 (+8)	126	22	33	8
Union/Wallowa	28	29 (+1)	35	6	32	3
Wasco	48	55 (+7)	77	13	35	6
Washington	183	207 (+24)	293	46	41	16
Yamhill	37	60 (+23)	85	11	37	4
STATEWIDE	3,364	4,275 (+911)	5,250	693	36	259

*CRB conducted 911 more reviews in 2017 than the prior year. The numbers in parenthesis show the difference.

**Children reviewed multiple times in the same year are only counted once.

***Volunteer counts on 12/6/2017.

Citizen Review Board
Oregon Judicial Department
1163 State Street
Salem, OR 97301

Phone: (503) 986-5861
Fax: (503) 986-5859
Toll Free: 1-888-530-8999
Oregon Relay Service-711
Website: www.ojd.state.or.us/crb

