



January 2016

# Citizen Review Board

## 5-Year Strategic Plan



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



# Table of Contents

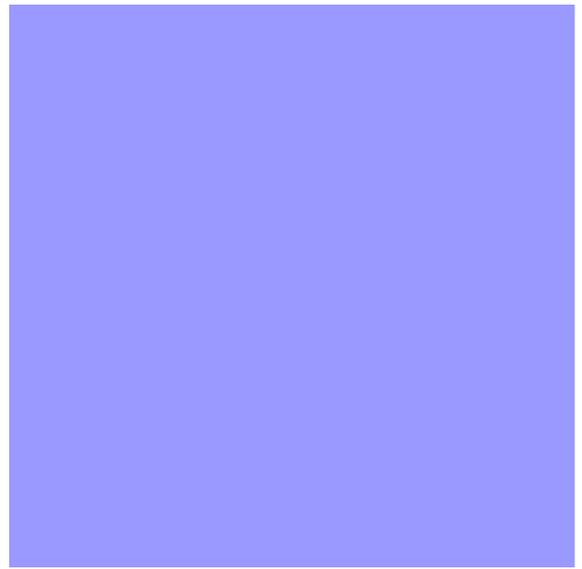
## Introduction

30 Years of Advocacy.....	2
The Strategic Planning Process.....	3
A New Computer System.....	3

## CRB Vision, Mission, Values and Goals.....4

## Roads to Our Vision

Access.....	6
Trust and Confidence.....	8
Dispute Resolution.....	10
Partnerships.....	12
Administration.....	14



## 30 Years of Advocacy

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 and facilitated by a team of professional staff. Currently, there are 59 boards in 33 of Oregon's 36 counties and approximately 300 volunteers serving on them statewide.

At the time the United States Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, there was a huge spike in the number of children entering foster care nationwide. Families were not receiving sufficient services and there were no guidelines for how long children could spend in foster care. This landmark legislation set numerous requirements regarding keeping children out of foster care and permanency planning for those in foster care. One of the requirements was that the case of every child in foster care be reviewed at least every six months.

Inspired by the success of the first citizen foster care review program in South Carolina, a high-powered corporate attorney turned rural Trappist monk named Father Paschal Phillips set out to bring citizen review to Oregon. He and about 20 other child advocates formed The Committee for Oregon Families that proposed legislation to create the CRB. In 1985, the Legislative Assembly passed House Bill 2333 establishing Oregon's citizen foster care review program.

By 1987, CRB had boards in almost every county in the state. Those early boards and the staff who supported them played a significant role in shaping policies and laws that ensured the state had a specific goal for each family it served, there was an early case planning meeting that included the child's entire family network, and that parents were provided written service agreements with concrete expectations of both the parents and the state.

In Oregon, CRB and the courts share responsibility for conducting the six-month reviews. Citizens bring an independent, diverse, and common sense perspective to foster care cases. They provide transparency and public oversight to a system that is largely closed due to the confidential nature of the 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.

Today, CRB continues to be an important check and balance to the child welfare system. At each review, they assess whether the child welfare agency is complying with policies and laws that are critically important to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care. For example, they verify whether caseworkers are visiting children in the foster home to ensure the home is safe, whether visitation plans between parents and children are appropriately updated to promote attachment, and whether children set to age out of the foster system have plans in place to navigate the sometimes tricky waters of independent adulthood.

Since its inception, CRB has conducted more than 200,000 reviews of children in foster care and educated thousands of citizen volunteers on the inner-workings of the child welfare system. It has been involved in the development of almost every state child welfare policy created and legislation passed since 1985, and continues to provide citizens a platform from which to improve how their community serves its most vulnerable children and families.

## The Strategic Planning Process

In July 2015, all CRB staff and the CRB Advisory Committee participated in an analysis of the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Three months later, all CRB staff and 20 volunteer board members from 17 different counties met in Salem for a two-day planning session to identify program priorities for the next five years. Because CRB is part of the Oregon Judicial Department, participants in the planning session made a conscious effort to align CRB priorities with the Department's five long-term goals of

**Access** - Increase Public Access to Justice;

**Trust and Confidence** - Promote Public Trust and Confidence;

**Dispute Resolution** - Provide Quality and Timely Dispute Resolution;

**Partnerships** - Engage Actively with Justice System Participants and Community; and

**Administration** - Advance Best Practices in Judicial Administration.

This 5-year strategic plan is a high-level summary of the CRB's goals, strategies, and action items that resulted from the two-day planning session.

### A New Computer System

For the past several years, CRB has been working on a plan to replace the computer system CRB uses to track children in foster care, schedule CRB reviews, and collect and report data on juvenile dependency cases. In 2016, CRB will implement Odyssey, the same case management system Oregon's circuit courts have been phasing in since 2012. CRB's successful implementation of Odyssey is critical to the implementation of this five-year strategic plan. While specific strategies related to the implementation of Odyssey are on the final pages of this plan under the Administration goal, highlighting Odyssey implementation here is important because Odyssey addresses, supports, and enhances all CRB goals in this plan.

# CRB

## Oregon's Foster Care Review Board



### 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 Goals**

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### ***Access***

Volunteer board members provide an impartial, culturally responsive legal review ensuring each participant has a voice that is heard.

### ***Trust and Confidence***

Citizen led reviews hold the child welfare system accountable for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

### ***Dispute Resolution***

CRB is a unique, less formal review process within the court system that assesses whether appropriate and timely services are being provided to parents and children.

### ***Partnerships***

CRB collaborates with stakeholders to advance system changes that improve the lives of Oregon's most vulnerable children and families.

### ***Administration***

CRB uses an integrated data system to collect and report information on program effectiveness and outcomes.

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# Access



**Goal:** Volunteer board members provide an impartial, culturally responsive legal review ensuring each participant has a voice that is heard.

## ***Strategy 1: Engage parties in the review***

Most parents and children age 14 years and older come to CRB reviews with a history of trauma and marginalization. They often distrust the child welfare system and vary in their understanding of it. These factors along with others such as limited-English proficiency, physical disabilities, and transportation issues can influence whether or not people attend a review, their level of participation when they do attend, and their ability to participate in ways that are helpful to their cause. Additionally, foster parents are usually the most knowledgeable of the child's current day-to-day life and yet are so easily overlooked because they are not legal parties to the case.

CRB is uniquely equipped to engage those less familiar with the court system. CRB reviews are held in conference rooms rather than courtrooms and conducted by volunteers who often look and sound like a neighbor. The information provided by parents, children, and foster parents is crucial to conducting a thorough review. CRB must continue to encourage their attendance and meaningful participation in reviews.

## ***Action Items***

- Year 1
- Continue to educate staff and board members on techniques for engaging persons with a history of trauma.
  - Devote time on the day of the review to plan how to engage individual parties.
  - Ask questions during the review to find out the reason when a parent, child age 14 years or older, or foster parent does not appear.

- Work with DHS and attorneys to notify CRB prior to the review when a client has a barrier that may impact their participation.
- Update the notice of review template with information about who to contact if there is a barrier that may affect participation.
- Track participation barriers so they can be addressed at the next review.
- Enlist child welfare system stakeholders to help communicate the importance of participating in the review.
- Create a CRB brochure for stakeholders to give to their clients.

- Year 2
- Create an online video for parents and others that explains the review process.
  - Reach out to advocacy organizations to find opportunities to talk to groups of parents, teens, and foster parents.

## ***Strategy 2: Recognize and mitigate the effects of bias***

The legislation establishing CRB prescribes that, as far as practicable, members of each local board shall represent the various socioeconomic and ethnic groups of the area served. Its intent is to ensure that reviews are fair and sensitive to the diversity within a community. The presence of bias, whether it be explicit or implicit, undercuts the integrity and value of systems. CRB is committed to taking its diversity mandate a step further by recruiting board members with experiences and cultures that reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the families served by the child welfare agency, and ensuring board members and staff are trained to both recognize and mitigate the effects of bias.

### ***Action Items***

- Year 1
- Report demographic information for each county and board annually.
  - Focus board member recruitment on groups that are underrepresented on a board.
  - Reconvene the Cultural Responsiveness Committee to develop detailed plans to further this strategy.
- Year 2
- Provide diversity training for all staff and board members.

### ***Measuring Results***

With the anticipated implementation of the Odyssey case management system in July 2016, CRB will begin tracking and regularly reporting persons who attend reviews. CRB will also periodically survey review attendees on whether they felt heard by the board and that the review appeared impartial and free from bias.



**Goal:** Citizen led reviews hold the child welfare system accountable for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

***Strategy 1: Recruit, train, and retain skilled board members***

CRB asks a lot of its volunteers. Prior to the review day, they must read through hundreds of pages of case material to familiarize themselves with the families. During reviews, they are expected to confidently question the parties and apply an informed understanding of child welfare policies to make a series of legal findings about the services provided to families. And, they must do all of this in an environment where people are in crisis. Because citizen review boards are only as strong as their members, CRB must find, recruit, train, and ultimately retain the skilled volunteers who can do this difficult work.

***Action Items***

- Year 1
  - Continue annual training conference for board members and stakeholders.
  - Field Managers arrange at least two local brown bag trainings annually.
- Year 2
  - Field Managers develop recruitment plans with their board members and the Volunteer Coordinator for boards with three or less members.
- Year 4
  - Provide at least two statewide training webinars annually for volunteers.
  - Develop an electronically fillable volunteer feedback form and integrate its completion into the volunteer reappointment process.

## ***Strategy 2: Make meaningful findings and recommendations***

Systems can lose their way and local citizen oversight is an effective check and balance when they do. The CRB requires its volunteers to live or work in the same county where they serve on a board. While there can be differences between boards based on the uniqueness of communities, there are certain standards that must be applied consistently for CRB to have a statewide impact. CRB must identify these standards and then continuously assess that boards are applying them in every county and every case.

### ***Action Items***

- Year 2
  - Ask board members and stakeholders what aspects of the review process they think need improvement.
  - Create a system for continuous quality improvement (CQI) that uses both staff and volunteers to observe reviews and evaluate findings and recommendations documents.
- Year 3
  - Work with DHS and the courts to increase use of CRB findings and recommendations response forms.

## ***Strategy 3: Review the case of every child in substitute care more than six months at least once per year***

In establishing CRB, Oregon made a commitment to transparency and public oversight of the foster care system. CRB shares responsibility with courts to review the cases of children in foster care at least every six months. Many cases receive more frequent reviews. However, for CRB to have an impact on these children and families, it must review the cases at least once per year.

### ***Action Items***

- Year 2
  - Create a report showing the percentage of children in foster care who have a CRB review annually by county.
- Year 3
  - Convene a workgroup to develop a plan for implementing annual CRB reviews.
- Year 5
  - Collect statistics on trial reunification placements and work with stakeholders to ensure these children are receiving timely periodic reviews.

## ***Measuring Results***

CRB will continue to track active volunteers per board, retention, and training. The CQI process will yield statistics on the quality of CRB reviews, and reports using Odyssey data will be developed that show the percentage of children in substitute care that have at least one CRB review annually.

# Dispute Resolution



**Goal:** CRB is a unique, less formal review process within the court system that assesses whether appropriate and timely services are being provided to parents and children.

## ***Strategy 1: Promote progress and improvements in individual cases***

When the Oregon Legislature created CRB, they acknowledged that ordinary citizens can recognize when children are safe, that someone is attending to their well-being, and that families are provided a fair chance to reunify as quickly as possible. In fact, the independent perspective of volunteers who do not work with these cases on a daily basis is an important check and balance to a system that sometimes must break apart families to protect children.

The state must at times intervene, but the truth is, a system of caring people cannot provide a child with the lifetime of emotional attachment and support needed to thrive. Systems fail and when they can fail something as important as a child, there must be multiple layers of safety nets to catch that child. CRB is one of those nets that calls attention to failures resulting from child welfare policies and laws not being followed or when the availability of services in a community are insufficient to meet the needs of its families.

## ***Action Items***

- Year 1 • Continue tracking negative findings made by boards statewide and report them quarterly to DHS' central office.
- Year 2 • Begin statewide tracking of the reasons why boards make certain negative findings about DHS services provided to the family.

- Year 3
- Create procedures to follow-up on the status of cases following reviews where certain negative findings are made.

## ***Strategy 2: Expand ways in which courts utilize their local CRB***

CRB reviews encourage participation from those less familiar with the court system and spend more time inquiring into the safety and well-being of children than typical court hearings. Because of these differences and others, CRB reviews complement judicial oversight of cases, particularly when CRB and courts coordinate their efforts. CRB is committed to improving this coordination to better protect and serve children and families.

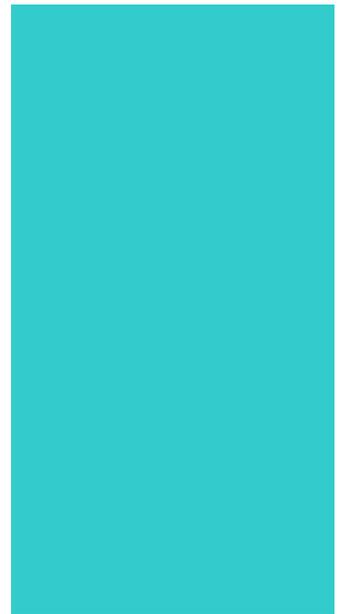
### ***Action Items***

- Year 1
- Invite local juvenile judges to observe CRB reviews.
  - Provide an annual opportunity for volunteer board members to meet with their local juvenile judges.
- Year 2
- Create a document outlining what CRB can do to support the courts.
  - Field staff work with local juvenile judges to coordinate efforts.

### ***Measuring Results***

CRB will continue to track and report negative findings and begin tracking the reasons for certain negative findings. Additionally, CRB will document all finalized coordination plans between boards and local courts.

# Partnerships



**Goal:** CRB collaborates with stakeholders to advance system changes that improve the lives of Oregon's most vulnerable children and families.

***Strategy 1:*** *Develop and support child welfare best practices and innovative policies for children and families*

If you ask a board member why he or she volunteers for CRB, the most frequent response you will hear is that they do it for the kids. They want to ensure that every child in their community gets to grow up in a safe and nurturing family. Child abuse and neglect is a shared community concern. Citizen support and engagement is critically important to the system and CRB's dual mandate: 1) to conduct reviews of children in foster care and 2) advocate for effective policies, procedures, and laws in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems is intended to provide a path for citizens to impact individual families and the larger system that serves them.

CRB staff have long represented the program on local and state child welfare improvement workgroups. In addition, since 2009, CRB has been coordinating Oregon's Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act (CAPTA) panels tasked with reviewing local child welfare practices and making recommendations for systemic improvements. CRB selects three panel sites each year and asks local board members, child welfare managers, attorneys, advocates, foster parents, and other community stakeholders to serve on them. Over the years, CAPTA panels have taken on such important issues as reducing the number of children in permanent foster care, visitation between parents and children, and foster parent recruitment and retention. While the work of CAPTA panels ends with the recommendations that are submitted to the child welfare agency, CRB can play a role in the implementation of those recommendations through its reviews and the identification of other local issues and trends that affect the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

## *Action Items*

- Year 1
  - CRB staff actively participate in local and state child welfare improvement workgroups.
- Year 2
  - Develop a process for boards to follow-up on CAPTA panel recommendations.
  - Develop a system for boards to escalate issues for further action.

## ***Strategy 2: Effectively communicate with the community***

CRB relies on the community to serve on its boards and to partner with to improve services to children and families. Effectively communicating CRB priorities to the community is an essential first step in advancing these efforts.

## *Action Items*

- Year 1
  - Continue publishing and distributing the CRB annual report.
  - Keep CRB social media current.
- Year 2
  - Convene workgroup to develop a plan to promote the program.

## ***Strategy 3: Increase legislator awareness of CRB's role in the child welfare system***

When the housing bubble burst in late 2007 and the United States entered its biggest recession since the Great Depression, the state of Oregon found itself facing a staggering budget shortfall. Legislators and administrators were forced to make deep cuts to state programs and in some cases, eliminate them entirely. During this time, CRB volunteers were instrumental in communicating the value of citizen review to local legislators. The citizen voice is powerful in a democracy and CRB volunteers can be very effective advocates for change that improves the lives of vulnerable children and families.

## *Action Items*

- Year 1
  - Invite legislators to observe reviews and meet with board members.
  - Write data informed policy papers and op-eds.
- Year 2
  - Utilize board members to advocate for OJD priorities related to children and families by meeting with their local legislators.

## ***Measuring Results***

Through its performance measures, CRB will report progress in certain areas that are the focus of CAPTA panel recommendations. Additionally, the issues boards escalate for further action may involve the collection and reporting of data, including juvenile court and CRB data in Odyssey.

# Administration

**Goal:** CRB uses an integrated data system to collect and report information on program effectiveness and outcomes.

***Strategy 1:*** *Develop and implement the Odyssey case management system*

In the late 1990s, the Judicial Department began building a state of the art case management system for CRB that integrated data from both the Department of Human Services (DHS) and all state circuit courts. The system was named the Juvenile OJIN Integrated Network (JOIN) and was among the first of its kind in the nation. JOIN served CRB well for over a decade, but problems with the integrations started to develop when both DHS and the courts transitioned to new computer systems. This coupled with a need to decommission the dated server on which JOIN exists led to a decision to replace JOIN entirely.

The Judicial Department selected Odyssey to replace JOIN because it was the same system used by the courts, had all of JOIN's core functionality, and included standard features that would enhance CRB business processes. With the implementation of Odyssey, CRB must ensure that Oregon continues to receive the benefits it had with JOIN, including reduced workload for DHS to report data to CRB, improved tracking of juveniles to assure timely reviews, and better statistics to assess state compliance with federal timelines.

## ***Action Items***

- Year 1
- Configure Odyssey for CRB business processes.
  - Build CRB forms in the Odyssey environment.
  - Update the JOIN/CRB Case File Update form.

- Assist information technology staff with development and implementation of a plan to integrate DHS data.
- Train staff how to use Odyssey.
- Populate Odyssey with active JOIN cases.
- Go-live with Odyssey.

## ***Strategy 2: Identify, track, and report on CRB performance measures***

Performance measures can provide insight into whether a program is operating efficiently as well as its impact on larger system objectives. CRB has a long history of collecting and reporting data on children in Oregon’s foster system. This data has been used to track caseworker contacts with children, youth participation in CRB reviews, placements with relatives, whether children are on track to graduate from high school, and many other factors that indicate how well the state is serving its most vulnerable children and families. Taking the next step to develop specific CRB performance measures will provide the program information to make strategic decisions that improve its operations and outcomes.

### ***Action Items***

- Year 2
- Identify CRB performance measures.
  - Develop and implement a data collection plan and reporting schedule.
  - Share results with volunteers and stakeholders.

### ***Measuring Results***

CRB anticipates that Odyssey will be fully functioning by July 2016. At that time, CRB and the Juvenile Court Improvement Program will develop statistical federal compliance reports that require the matching of DHS, court, and CRB data. Additionally, CRB will begin regularly reporting performance measures by the end of 2017.

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