



2016 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've been thinking a lot about change lately. What is it that pushes us through the inevitable denial (*Everything's fine! You just don't understand!*) and resistance (*This is not my fault! If only I had more...*) to meaningful, coordinated action (*Let's do this!*)? And, how do we harness the strengths of existing people and systems so we aren't hurled into an abyss of unknowns? Because I have learned the hard way that new or more is not always better.

Since the high-profile cases of abuse in Oregon foster homes, there have been multiple reviews of the state child welfare system. The independent Public Knowledge (PK) review commissioned by Governor Brown found that space availability was driving placement decisions, rather than the needs of children; and that the urgency to find placements compromises certification and licensing standards. The federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) of Oregon found inconsistencies in investigations and follow-up on allegations of abuse in foster care, and that a lack of quality caseworker visits with children and parents was the primary factor driving various areas needing improvement. Most recently, an internal review by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) of its own differential response program found that 47 of 101 protective services assessments incorrectly concluded the child was safe to remain with his or her parents while the family engaged in services.

Findings such as these are intensely frustrating because, as echoed in the PK report, there have been a number of similar reviews over the last decade, but little has been done. As the report concluded, "[t]he time to act is now." And the CFSR provided some guidance for how to do this that I found encouraging. It stated that "DHS's investment in collaborative relationships with stakeholders results in meaningful outcomes," and that these "established partnerships can be leveraged, in conjunction with a routinely functioning quality assurance system, to support the improvements needed for children and families in Oregon."

I have had the opportunity to participate in many meetings with community partners who I know share my lifelong commitment to protecting children. I leave some of these meetings hopeful that improvements are coming, and others shaking with frustration (*They aren't listening! This is going nowhere!*) In these times, I remind myself that change is exceedingly hard, and that even highly productive teams usually go through a process Psychologist Bruce Tuckman coined "forming, storming, norming, and performing."

In the storming stage, there is conflict, resistance, and stress. It is the time where many teams fail. So, how can we push through this? How do we ensure our teams don't fail? As simple as this sounds, I think the answer is that we continue to show up. We continue to advocate. We continue to push. The author Mary Anne Radmacher once wrote that "Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, *I will try again tomorrow.*" In 2017, CRB will unveil a new approach to preparing for reviews designed to focus inquiry on the major issues of cases, and will conduct a process and outcome evaluation that will lay the foundation for development of program performance measures and a quality assurance system of our own. It will be an exciting year. So I ask you to join me and...*Let's do this!*

Leola L. McKenzie

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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 268 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 law clarified expectations for state child welfare agencies regarding keeping children out of foster care and permanency planning for those in foster care. The law set 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. Some, like New York and Nevada, have judges do them. Others, like Massachusetts and Colorado, have internal reviews conducted by the child

welfare agency. Oregon, like South Carolina, Arizona, Delaware, and others, has 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. Prior to reviews, board members have access to case material in order to familiarize themselves with the families. Legal parents or

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.

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. Additionally, other interested parties such as service providers, grandparents, and other extended family may be invited.

During reviews, board members answer a series of questions, called findings, that determine whether the state has provided sufficient services to the family, how the parents are doing in those services, and what type of goal is most appropriate for the child (reunification with a parent, adoption, etc.). Before making each finding, board members direct questions to those present to fill in any gaps in information from the case material and gain insight into different perspectives that may exist on what has occurred in a case. The board's findings and any recommendations are compiled into a report and sent to the juvenile court, child welfare agency, those who attended the review, and any legal party not able to attend.

Our Staff

CRB has 25 full-time and part-time employees. Thirteen are Field Managers responsible for coordinating local boards, staffing reviews, preparing the boards' findings and recommendations reports, and representing the CRB on local child welfare improvement workgroups. The remaining employees include seven clerical staff, a volunteer coordinator, two analysts and part-time board coverage persons, the assistant director, and director. Most staff work out of two main offices located in Salem and Portland. Seven staff work out of courthouses located in Eugene, Hillsboro, Klamath Falls, Medford, and Pendleton.

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 2016, 281 board members collectively donated 29,013 hours of service to the state preparing for and conducting 3,364 reviews of 4,503 children in foster



Baker County Citizen Review Board

care. Additionally, during 2016, these citizen volunteers completed 3,990 hours of continuing education on topics important to the cases they review. This is a cost benefit to Oregon of \$866,310

CRB is committed to ensuring its reviews are fair and sensitive to the diversity within a community. Oregon law directs the program to recruit board members from groups with special knowledge or interest in foster care and, as far as practicable, that they be representative of the various socioeconomic and ethnic groups of the area served. As of April 6, 2017:

- 32% of boards had a member who is a person of color,
- 26% had a member 35 years of age or younger,
- 35% had a member who reported earning less than \$35,000 annually,
- 63% had a member with a background in education, 29% in health care, 31% in law, and 18% in social work.

CRB is making special efforts to increase the diversity of its boards. Over the next year, CRB will focus board member recruitment on groups that are underrepresented on boards and provide diversity training to all staff and volunteers to ensure they have the tools to both recognize and mitigate the effects of bias.

The Children

According to DHS' Oregon Child Welfare Data Set, 11,434 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care in 2016. 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. The CRB data included in this report is for the time period beginning January 1, 2016 and ending November 30, 2016. CRB implemented a new computer system in December and data from that month is not currently available.

CRB reviewed 4,503 children in foster care in 2016. About a third of these children were under 5 years old, which child development researchers tell us is a critical time for bonding with parents and developing self-esteem, emotional regulation, and other basic social and learning skills. Nearly a quarter were age 15 to 21 years. Many of these young adults will age out of the foster system without the familial safety nets that others have, therefore, it is imperative that the state adequately prepare them for independence.

Generally, under federal and state law, parents have about fourteen months to correct the circumstances causing their children to remain in foster care before the court must consider moving to an alternative plan. This alternative could be adoption, guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or some type of permanent foster care arrangement. Over half (52%) of the children the CRB reviewed in 2016 had been in foster care 14 months or less.

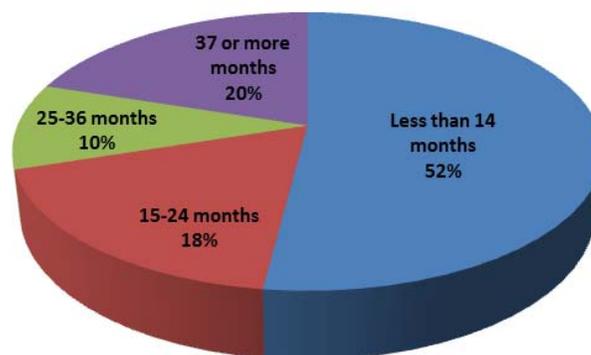
The majority of children leave foster care because they are reunified with a parent. According to the Oregon Child Welfare Data Set, of the 3,762 children who left care in 2016, 61% were reunified with a parent. Nineteen percent left care because they were adopted, 9% left due to a guardianship, and 10% aged out. For cases that proceed to adoption, the goal is to have the adoption finalized within two years of the child entering foster care. The timeline should be even quicker for guardianships. Of the children reviewed by CRB in 2016, only 18% had been in care 15 to 24 months. Therefore, many children the CRB reviewed (30%) were

	Children Reviewed by CRB
Age	
Under 5 Years	33%
5 – 9 Years	26%
10 – 14 Years	20%
15 – 18 Years	18%
19 – 21 Years	3%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%
Caucasian	74%
Hispanic	14%
Native American	6%

likely in some type of permanent foster care arrangement, or had a plan of adoption or guardianship that had run past the goal for finalization. Children in these circumstances are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of long-term placement in foster care.

The vast majority (74%) of children reviewed by CRB in 2016 were Caucasian followed by 14% Hispanic, 6% Native American, 4% African American, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. While nearly a third of citizen review boards during this time had a member who is a person of color, this is of little consolation to the many families who appear before a board having not one member who looks like them. This is why, in addition to focusing board member recruitment on underrepresented groups, CRB requires each board member to have at least one hour of cultural competency training annually, and always includes one or more cultural training sessions during its annual Every Day Counts... conference.

Length of Time in Foster Care at Time of CRB Review



Strategic Plan Implementation

In January 2016, CRB finalized a 5-year [strategic plan](#). This ambitious plan was the result of a two-day planning workshop held six months earlier and attended by all CRB staff and 20 volunteer board members from 17 different counties. By the end of the workshop, 12 strategies and 51 action items were identified to implement 5 overall program goals:

1. **ACCESS** - Volunteer board members provide an impartial, culturally responsive legal review ensuring each participant has a voice that is heard.
2. **TRUST & CONFIDENCE** - Citizen led reviews hold the child welfare system accountable for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.
3. **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.
4. **PARTNERSHIPS** - CRB collaborates with stakeholders to advance system changes that improve the lives of Oregon's most vulnerable children and families.
5. **ADMINISTRATION** - CRB uses an integrated data system to collect and report information on program effectiveness and outcomes.

In March 2016, CRB staff divided into groups, with each group responsible for implementing a strategy. Detailed plans were developed to implement all first year action items. These action items included such large-scale projects as implementing a new computer system and conducting a feedback survey of all CRB review participants. Smaller-scale items included projects like creating a CRB informational brochure for parents; offering additional training opportunities to board members; and inviting judges to meet with board members and, when possible, observe some CRB reviews.

Safety in Foster Care

The high-profile cases of abuse in Oregon foster homes made clear that we need to better protect our children. First and foremost, children must be protected from abuse and neglect, and we cannot accept a system unable to do this for the children in its own care.

As child welfare, courts, attorneys, advocates, and other system partners across the state began examining how this could happen on their watch and making changes to prevent it from happening again, CRB also began examining its own practices. In early 2016, a team of CRB staff and a volunteer board member reviewed all the reports from CRB reviews held in Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas counties that occurred in the prior five years where the child had been placed in one of two programs that had been shut down for safety violations.

The team met in March 2016 to discuss their findings and identify action items for future work on this issue. The team divided into four workgroups tasked with:

1. Identifying qualitative questions boards should ask during reviews about the foster placement;
2. Identifying characteristics that make cases vulnerable to safety concerns and create a proposal for what boards should do when cases have them;
3. Write a letter to the Public Defense Services Commission on the quality of attorney representation at CRB reviews across the state; and
4. Review all CRB reports of children placed in group homes or behavioral rehabilitation services (BRS) placements quarterly to get a statewide perspective.

Results from action items 1 and 2 were compiled into a one-page technical assistance guide for CRB staff and board members, and presented during a session at the 2016 annual CRB conference. For action

item 3, CRB surveyed board members about attorney attendance during reviews throughout the month of August 2016. And lastly, for action item 4, CRB began flagging all reports from CRB reviews of children in group homes and BRS placements, developed an assessment tool to collect data on them, and identified staff to assess the reports quarterly.



Session at the 2016 Every Day County... conference

Annual CRB Conference

The annual Every Day Counts... conference was held May 6-7, 2016, in Eugene. Approximately 225 volunteer board members and child welfare stakeholders attended the conference. The conference offered two keynote sessions, twelve breakout sessions, and twenty table topics during the CRB Discovery Café.

During Friday's keynote address, conference attendees learned about the challenges faced by youth who are homeless; many of whom aged out of foster care. On Saturday, attendees listened to Genia Baines and Rhea Cramer, a mother and daughter, speak about their lives and breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Their stories were very moving and thought provoking. Participants also completed a poverty quiz and activity to demonstrate the "class continuum."

Breakout sessions covered a variety of topics including, differential response and case screening processes, safety in foster care, engaging youth, international placements, and how to model respectful treatment of youth who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning).

One of the most popular workshops focused on fathers who have been engaged with the system and are successfully parenting.

As in years past, there were basket raffles to support Camp to Belong Northwest, a summer camp that reunites siblings separated by foster care. The raffle raised \$4,400, enough to send almost 9 children to camp!

A New Computer System

After three years of planning and development, CRB fully implemented Odyssey, its new electronic case management system, on December 12, 2016. In the year leading up to go-live, CRB worked closely with the Judicial Department's Office of Education, Training and Outreach and Enterprise Technology Services Division to:

- Finalize configuration of Odyssey,
- Update affected business processes and forms,
- Reconfigure the daily data transfers from the Department of Human Services (DHS),
- Install necessary hardware and software, and
- Train staff how to use the new system.

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.

Enhanced Role of Advisory Committee

During the budget reductions in 2010, the CRB Advisory Committee, composed of volunteer board members from throughout the state, played a crucial role in helping the program identify areas to scale back. As CRB began to recover following the budget crisis, the frequency of committee meetings were reduced to quarterly two-hour conference calls with one in-person meeting annually.

At the in-person meeting on May 6, 2016, committee members expressed wanting to have a greater

CAPTA Panels

role in implementation of strategic plan priorities. Members committed to attending a five-hour in-person meeting in Salem every other month on a Saturday. CRB also recruited additional committee members in an effort to ensure all regions of Oregon were represented.

The committee held three of these five-hour in-person meetings in 2016 and was instrumental in development of a CRB review participant survey, a CRB informational brochure for parents, a letter to Governor Kate Brown regarding the independent Public Knowledge report of child and youth safety in Oregon's child substitute care system, and finally, began laying the foundation for a new issue-focused approach to conducting CRB reviews.

Enhancing Participation in Reviews

The Access goal in the CRB 5-Year Strategic Plan states “[v]olunteer board members [will] provide an impartial, culturally responsive legal review ensuring each participant has a voice that is heard.” To do this, CRB needed to find out to what extent current review participants feel heard by the board and that the review appears impartial and free from bias.

A CRB review participant survey was created with guidance from the CRB Advisory Committee. This short, easy to fill out survey focused specifically on the four key procedural fairness principles of voice, neutrality, respect, and trust. Researchers within the justice and court systems have found that focusing on procedural fairness builds trust and encourages compliance, regardless of who the people using the courts are.

Throughout the month of October 2016, any person who attended a CRB review was asked to complete the anonymous survey. A total of 555 surveys were completed for the 293 reviews held that month. Results showed that 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the board listened to them, and 97% agreed or strongly agreed the review was conducted in a neutral manner. The assessment findings were shared with CRB staff and thoroughly reviewed by the Advisory Committee. CRB intends to periodically repeat this assessment to ensure review participants continue to feel treated fairly.

In 1996, an amendment to the federal Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandated that every state establish at least three Citizen Review Panels tasked with reviewing local child welfare practices and making recommendations for systemic improvements. CRB has been coordinating Oregon's three panels since 2012

In 2016, CRB selected Benton County, Multnomah County, and Umatilla and Morrow counties as panel sites. This was the third year for the panel in Multnomah County and the first year for the others. Panels met in August and September 2016 to choose a focus for the year:

- Benton County selected efforts to improve reunification of children and parents with a focus on parent-child visitation,
- Multnomah County selected transition planning for older foster youth, and
- Umatilla and Morrow counties selected child welfare worker retention due to the negative impact of high worker turnover on early engagement of families.

Panels met regularly through February 2017 before holding public forums to solicit community and stakeholder feedback on their recommendations to the Department of Human Services (DHS).

During the course of their work, panels heard from community programs and stakeholders, created and disseminated surveys, and examined DHS child welfare data to gain a better understanding of the specific issues related to their chosen topic. The panels used this information to craft recommendations to DHS intended to improve local practice in a meaningful way.

The final report will be posted to the CRB website and submitted to DHS in May 2017. DHS is then required to respond to the report and include it in their federal reporting.

CRB STATEWIDE STATISTICS 2016 CALENDAR YEAR*

COUNTY	CRB REVIEWS	CHILDREN REVIEWED**	INTERESTED PARTIES IN ATTENDANCE	BOARD DAYS	AVERAGE MINUTES PER CRB REVIEW	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS ***
Baker	33	45	378	7	33	5
Benton	25	31	150	4	40	3
Clackamas	107	130	382	32	35	12
Clatsop	49	56	248	11	36	5
Columbia	138	182	633	21	37	6
Coos	143	211	591	23	39	7
Crook/Jefferson	80	94	403	12	38	3
Curry	27	33	118	6	44	4
Deschutes	146	186	774	22	38	11
Douglas	196	312	971	27	38	10
Grant/Harney	16	30	183	5	37	3
Hood River	12	11	63	6	44	3
Jackson	251	377	1,265	39	39	19
Josephine	155	210	731	23	37	11
Klamath	206	249	970	33	37	9
Lake	18	14	75	4	38	2
Lane	672	847	3,649	98	33	48
Lincoln	77	110	532	22	40	10
Linn	119	157	545	21	37	8
Malheur	72	101	829	11	37	5
Marion	281	390	1,528	60	35	23
Multnomah	73	86	214	21	38	9
Polk	59	75	297	19	39	10
Tillamook	20	22	113	4	33	3
Umatilla/Morrow	93	121	1,211	20	34	7
Union/Wallowa	28	37	306	6	35	4
Wasco	48	65	172	11	34	6
Washington	183	263	954	43	43	17
Yamhill	37	58	259	11	35	5
STATEWIDE	3,364	4,503	18,544	650	37	268

*Data from December 2016 is not included due to CRB's transition to a new electronic case management system on 12/12/16.

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

***Volunteer counts on April 11, 2017.

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