

# Oregon CAPTA Citizen Review Panel Report

## 2016 - 2017 Fiscal Year

### History of CAPTA Panels

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires every state to create at least three Citizen Review Panels (Panels) to review systemic issues in the child welfare system and make recommendations to improve related policies, practices, and procedures. In September 2012, the Department of Human Services (DHS) transferred responsibility for administering the Panels to the Oregon Judicial Department's Citizen Review Board (CRB), Oregon's citizen foster care review program.

Since 2012, Panels have been established in eight of the state's 36 counties. Some of the issues that the previous Panels have addressed include: increasing relative placement and connections for foster children, removing financial disincentives to permanency, increasing face-to-face contacts between caseworkers and children in care, and improving foster parent recruitment and retention.

Panel members include CRB volunteer board members and staff, judges, DHS staff, attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), foster parents, service providers and other community stakeholders involved in the child welfare system.



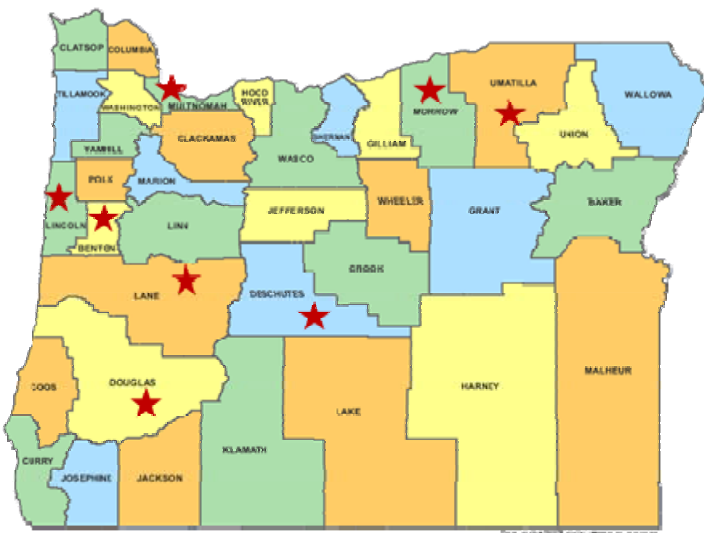
### Current Panels

This year, the three Panels were in Multnomah County, Benton County, and Umatilla and Morrow counties. This is the third year for the Panel in Multnomah County, and the first year for the Panels in Benton and Umatilla/Morrow counties.

The Panels met in August and September 2016 to choose a focus for their review. Each Panel developed a list of potential issues within the local child welfare system and then selected one.

The Panels met regularly through February 2017 before holding public forums to solicit community and stakeholder feedback on their recommendations to DHS. During the course of their work, the 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 then crafted recommendations to DHS related to the work they had done on their chosen topic. The recommendations from the Panels are intended to improve local practice in a meaningful way and address the issues that were identified during the course of the Panels' work.

### CAPTA Panels in Oregon Since 2012



# Benton County Citizen Review Panel

## **PANEL MEMBERS**

### **Circuit Court**

Hon. Locke A. Williams

### **CRB**

Walt Gullett (staff)

Theresa Hedrick

Bridget Tyler

### **CASA**

Todd Mulrooney

Kari Rieck

### **DHS**

Alex Jackson

Deena Loughary

### **DOJ**

Sarah Morris

### **Attorney**

Danielle O'Brien

## **MEETING DATES**

August 16, 2016

September 19, 2016

November 14, 2016

December 15, 2016

February 10, 2017

The Benton County Panel focused on efforts to improve reunification for children in foster care, specifically on increasing and improving parent-child visitation. National data has shown that frequent, quality contact between parents and child is one of the strongest predictors of successful reunification.

While Benton County is served by the same DHS district as Linn and Lincoln counties, it is in many ways unique with challenges and opportunities specific to the demographics and services in the county. In 2016, Benton County had a total of 79 children spend at least one night in foster care (according to DHS child welfare data set). In comparison, Linn County had 300 children in foster care in 2016 and Lincoln County had 243.

Because Benton County has approximately 70% fewer children in care compared to the rest of the DHS district, this presents staffing and service challenges. The Benton County DHS office is staffed with 2 Social Services Assistants (SSAs) who schedule and supervise family visits for children in foster care. Having only two staff members to supervise and schedule parent-child visits means that there is less room for flexibility and rescheduling of visits simply because there are fewer scheduling slots available. Opportunities to have supervised community visits occur outside of the DHS visitation rooms are also decreased in Benton County because of the smaller number of children in care: Benton County does not have a Family Tree Relief Nursery or other type of visitation center in the county. In Benton County, all supervised visits currently occur at the DHS office.

The CAPTA Panel heard from attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), and DHS supervisors that it is uncommon for families to receive more than the minimum visitation required by DHS policy. Because there is not a community visitation option available, the only opportunity for visitation occurs at the DHS office, supervised by the two SSAs on staff. Research has shown that foster children who had frequent parent visits were more likely to have higher well-being ratings, adjusted better to placement, and experienced shorter time in placement.<sup>1</sup> While a weekly hour long visit is the required minimum, it is certainly not best practice for children and families. However, Benton County DHS struggles to provide more visitation than this due to a lack of availability in the schedules of the SSAs.

The Panel explored possible in-county resources who could contract with DHS to provide some supervised or supported visitation for families. It is clear that at current staffing, DHS is not able to provide multiple hours of supervised visitation to each family. However, by contracting with community partners, DHS could refer families to additional visitation hours outside of the DHS office, and potentially outside of the DHS office hours, to increase the number of parent-child visitation hours.

Increasing and improving parent-child visitation is a critical component of improving reunification efforts. Child welfare policy requires the development of an Ongoing Visitation and Contact Plan within 30 days of a child being placed in care. This plan is required to be updated every 90 days to ensure that visitation becomes less restrictive as safety threats are diminished. In practice, because these visitation plans are typically not included with documents submitted to the CRB and the court, there is no oversight as to whether these internal plans are being routinely updated. Far too often it appears that visitation continues to be supervised in the office until right before a child is able to go home, when it seems more appropriate for less-restrictive visitation plans to be a part of ongoing reunification planning and efforts.

## Benton County Panel Recommendations

1. DHS work with community partners (foster families, faith-based organizations, service organizations, etc.) to identify and develop a community visitation program that will allow supervised or supported visitation for children and parents outside of the DHS office.
2. DHS ensure that the Ongoing Visitation and Contact Plan is updated every 90 days and that visitation is becoming less restrictive as the safety threat to the child decreases.
3. DHS consider whether an additional part-time SSA position is needed in Benton County to provide additional options for parent-child visitation.

<sup>1</sup>Hess, Peg McCartt, (2003). **Visiting Between Children in Care and Their Families: A Look at Current Policy**. New York: The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work. Available at: [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/downloads/visiting\\_report-10-29-03.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/downloads/visiting_report-10-29-03.pdf)

# Multnomah County Citizen Review Panel

## **PANEL MEMBERS**

### **CRB**

David Smith (staff)  
Tony Richoix  
Alida Royse

### **CASA**

Betsy Stark Miller  
Lynn Travis

### **DHS**

Edgar Perez

### **Court Improvement**

Mary Geelan

## **MEETING DATES**

September 9, 2016  
November 16, 2016  
December 6, 2016  
January 25, 2017  
February 22, 2017

The Multnomah County Panel focused on transition planning for older foster youth. In 2016, 331 foster youth “aged out” of foster care in Oregon. Multnomah County accounted for almost 30% of those youth, having 92 youth “age out” of foster care upon or after turning 18. National studies of youth who “age out” of foster care have shown that they are more likely than youth in the general population to not finish high school, to be unemployed, and to be dependent on public assistance. It is critically important that older foster youth engage in comprehensive, thoughtful transition planning to give them the best possible chance at successful adulthood.

The Multnomah CAPTA Panel began their work by examining current DHS transition planning efforts. DHS is in the process of updating their transition planning documents from the prior “T1” and “T2” plans to a new five-step “Youth Transition Plan.” After reviewing the new transition planning documents and learning how DHS was training caseworkers on the new plans, the Panel was heartened to see that DHS is making positive efforts to address the gaps in their transition planning for older foster youth. The new planning documents are far more comprehensive and youth-driven than the prior ones had been. However, after the Multnomah Panel finished its work, questions still remain about how DHS is approaching transition planning for youth overall, and whether that approach is fulfilling DHS’ duties towards encouraging the engagement of older foster youth.

The Multnomah County Panel held a public forum and invited the Insight Teen Parenting program and the three Independent Living Program (ILP) providers in the county: New Avenues for Youth (which services 180 foster youth), Impact Northwest (which serves approximately 50 foster youth), and Native Family Center (which provides culturally-specific transition services for Native foster youth). Together, these programs provide all of the ILP services in Multnomah County. The programs receive a referral from DHS when a foster youth turns 16 and are able to work with the youth through age 21. The average caseload for an ILP worker is 22 youth and the average time spent with each youth is 4 hours per month.

During the public forum, the Panel had the opportunity to hear from ILP workers, foster youth, attorneys, and other stakeholders about their experience with DHS transition planning. The overall response to the new Youth Transition Plan documents was positive. However, there were multiple statements from attendees that DHS was not coordinating with the ILP workers and was very “hands off” when it came to transition planning for older foster youth. One attorney present stated that when she asked DHS caseworkers about the transition plan for her clients, she was told it was ILP’s job to deal with transition plans, not DHS’. The ILP workers reported that there was very little collaboration or information sharing from DHS, pointing out that they were not invited to court or CRB hearings, were not informed when a case had closed, and that they did not have any team meetings with the DHS caseworker. Several attendees described the lack of contact between ILP programs and DHS as “abysmal.” The Panel felt the above comments did not meet DHS’ duties to encourage youth to participate in the transition planning critical to their success.

While this was the chief concern mentioned by the public forum attendees, it was not the only issue raised. Equally important was a sense that DHS caseworkers who work with teens are not getting specific, necessary training on the important benefits that are

available to foster youth and the timelines during which they can access these benefits. There was also concern that the DHS caseworkers who work with older youth do not necessarily have the training and skills to make personal connections with teens. The foster youth in attendance shared that they felt a greater connection with their ILP worker than with their caseworker - one teen shared that he had had three different DHS caseworkers and he felt that for his caseworker, he was a “business” and not a person. Another foster youth shared that he felt like his ILP worker was in the profession because she cared about helping him, while his DHS caseworkers didn’t know him or his goals. DHS and ILP need to work as a team in order to provide the optimal personal transition plan for each youth and supporting the youth’s engagement and success.

All three ILP providers shared that the number of referrals they have received from DHS recently has dropped. The ILP providers did not believe that the number of older youth in care has decreased, but that the referrals are not being made in a timely manner and that DHS is not referring foster youth who receive Developmental Disability Services or who have behavioral or mental health needs. The ILP providers said that they were willing and able to build in a higher level of service for higher needs foster youth, but DHS is not making the referrals for these youth. Timely referrals to ILP services are critically important because it takes time to develop a relationship between the youth and the ILP provider. If a referral is not made by age 16 and a foster youth decides to exit DHS care at age 18, there may not be enough time for that foster youth to develop a personal relationship with his or her ILP provider and to develop a comprehensive transition plan for adulthood.

After reviewing the new transition planning documents, DHS policy on transition planning for older foster youth, and hearing directly from ILP providers and current foster youth engaged in ILP services, the Multnomah County Panel developed the following recommendations to DHS. These recommendations are aimed at improving transition planning for older foster youth and ensuring that youth who age out of foster care are given every possible opportunity to be successful independent adults. As one of the foster youth said in the public forum, “Youth potential is not being realized. Not a lot of us make it out. Those that do don’t make it out happy.” DHS has a responsibility to ensure that every foster child aging out of care has the opportunity not just to make it out, but to have a happy, healthy adult life.

## Multnomah County Panel Recommendations

1. DHS must improve communication with contracted ILP providers. ILP providers should be invited to court hearings, CRB reviews, Youth Decision Meetings, and any other team meetings. If attendance is not possible, then ILP should be asked to submit a written report. It is the responsibility of the DHS caseworker to know the status of the youth’s transition planning and to remain informed of the youth’s progress in ILP services. Participation as a team demonstrates to the youth the importance of ILP in their transition planning.
2. DHS must develop and provide specific training to caseworkers who work with older foster youth. This training should include both interpersonal skill building with teens and in-depth training about the specific benefits available to older foster youth who remain in care beyond their 18th birthday.
3. DHS must make timely referrals to ILP services. DHS must recognize that there needs to be time to develop a relationship between the youth and the ILP provider and referrals need to be made as soon as possible.
4. DHS needs to change the way that it approaches ILP services. It should be youth driven, not paperwork driven. DHS should be recruiting foster youth into ILP services, not just making a referral once the youth turns 16.

# Umatilla/Morrow County Citizen Review Panel

## **PANEL MEMBERS**

### **CRB**

Dru Powers  
John Nichols (staff)

### **CASA**

Diane Shockman

### **Community Counseling Solutions**

Joe Streetman

### **DHS**

Valerie Gawf  
Rachel Greer  
Marvin Hamilton  
Jyl Hobbs  
Dianna Ilaoa  
Linda Olson  
Lidwinner Machado  
Bonnie Ullom

### **District Attorney**

Monte Ludington

## **MEETING DATES**

August 23, 2016  
September 27, 2016  
October 25, 2016  
November 22, 2016  
December 13, 2016  
February 28, 2017  
March 28, 2017

The Umatilla/Morrow Panel initially chose early family engagement as an area of focus because of how critical it is to ensuring the best possible outcome for children and families. As panel members began to review this issue, its focus narrowed to perceived staffing issues within the Department of Human Services (the Agency) that prevent Child Protective Services (CPS) workers, the first point of contact between the Agency and a family in need of services, from effectively carrying out the duties of their position. Part of these duties include conducting a Comprehensive CPS Assessment of the family within 30 days of receiving a report that meets the criteria for child abuse or neglect and the CPS worker has assured the child's immediate safety through an in-home safety plan or foster placement.

The CPS unit in Umatilla and Morrow counties are experiencing near constant staff turnover, and are chronically behind in completing their assessments. The concern is that this stressed system is preventing families from being adequately assessed, which may diminish their early engagement in services and, of even more concern, potentially compromise child safety. To research this issue, the panel surveyed current and former CPS workers on various aspects of the position. The panel sent out 32 surveys and 21 were completed and returned, which is a 65% response rate.

The results of the survey showed that current and former CPS workers in Umatilla and Morrow counties felt that four broad areas of issues were contributing to stress, dissatisfaction, and ultimately, high turnover within the CPS unit. These areas include supervisory issues, caseload issues, on-call issues, and team building issues.

### ***Supervisory Issues***

When asked to rate their experience working with CPS supervisors from 1-5, with 5 being "excellent" and 1 being "very poor," 11% of respondents rated it as a 5 while 32% rated it as a 1. Survey respondents indicated that part of their frustration is based on supervisors who don't have CPS experience, who don't know CPS policy, and who don't have leadership or management training or education. Another frustration was the perception that there is little consistency in CPS direction and that very little of the direction feels driven by policy.

### ***Caseload Issues***

Currently, DHS child welfare is staffed at 83%. CPS workers report their caseloads are very high. As an example, in January 2017, there were 111 new referrals assigned between 7 caseworkers. This is roughly 16 new referrals per caseworker in addition to the ongoing assessments being carried as part of the caseload. Most respondents indicated that caseloads were too high to be effectively managed within a 40-hour work week, and the stress of trying to maintain a work/life balance took too large a toll. Staff shortages resulting from vacancies and employees on leave only exacerbate the already stressed system. CPS workers suggested that there should be no more than 8 new referrals per worker per month, and that staffing should be determined by the average number of assessments throughout the year.

Additionally, CPS workers reported feeling the number of positions allocated to their district did not take into consideration the amount of travel required in rural districts with

large geographic footprints. It was later confirmed that the Workload Model that determines position allocations statewide does in fact include a calculation for travel time. And, it is the same for urban and rural districts because when Workload Model staff spent time in the districts timing activities, delays resulting from traffic in urban areas were comparable to long distance drives in rural areas. This was partly due to workers in rural areas maximizing their time by planning multiple contacts when a long distance drive was required, and partly because the majority of the population they serve were located within a reasonable proximity to the DHS office. Nevertheless, the feeling that CPS workers in Umatilla and Morrow counties have about there being an imbalance in the workload and the amount of travel required to complete that work is real and worth exploring further. It was suggested that part of this could be due to the distance of service providers for the children and families.

### ***On-Call Issues***

Multiple survey respondents indicated that the current after business hours on-call schedule is unsustainable. Currently, these duties rotate amongst a very limited number of CPS workers who remain on call for a week at a time. Being on call every month was seen as a major stress for many survey respondents. They also objected to only the CPS workers needing to be on-call rather than all CPS trained child welfare workers in the branch. Multiple survey respondents suggested that if on-call duties were spread amongst all caseworkers, it would create a more manageable on-call schedule for everyone.

### ***Team Building Issues***

Survey respondents indicated a need for internal team building and for increased opportunities to partner with community members and organizations. When a child needs to be placed in foster care, the survey respondents indicated that getting support from other colleagues (certifiers, support staff, etc.) during the initial placement efforts would be very helpful. For example, an on-call certifier to assist the caseworker when a child is picked up after hours could reduce the time it takes to find a shelter placement.

A focus group was held in March 2017 in which all current CPS workers (supervisors, caseworkers, support staff, and screeners) were invited to share their thoughts on the four identified areas. The panel would like to thank all of the CPS staff who completed a survey and participated in the focus group. Your input was invaluable in helping the panel

## **Umatilla/Morrow County Panel Recommendations**

### ***Supervisory Issues***

1. Create a permanent CET (Consultant, Educator, and Trainer) position for the district. This position would assist with direct training of staff, case consultation, and education of CPS workers regarding the Oregon Safety Model, court presentation, family engagement, OR-Kids, and other CPS duties.
2. Additional training on the Oregon Safety Model be provided by consultants to new CPS supervisors in the district to ensure consistency in how the model is utilized.
3. All CPS supervisors have extensive knowledge of CPS practice and policy, and not less than three years of experience in CPS casework.

### ***Caseload Issues***

4. DHS consider re-evaluating the current calculation for travel time in the Workload Model used to allocate positions to DHS districts.

5. DHS consider creating a statewide pool of retired and former caseworkers who are willing to work on a temporary basis to fill in during a vacancy or extended leave of a staff person.

***On-Call Issues***

6. All caseworkers who are CPS trained should be part of the on-call rotation, not just the current CPS caseworkers.

***Team Building Issues***

7. DHS enhance and support teamwork, particularly when a child is picked up, by a) providing district-wide cross training so workers can assist each other when needed; b) expand the Embrace Oregon model statewide to enlist and utilize volunteers more effectively; and c) create a checklist of steps required to place a child in foster care for caseworkers, certifiers, and support staff.
8. Provide time during office and district meetings of the CPS unit for communication, support, and training. Conversations should focus on how everyone (supervisors, caseworkers, support staff, and screeners) can help and support each other.

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