



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY
2018 Arizona Citizen Review Panel Report
Agency Response to Recommendations

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (the Department or DCS) is pleased to receive and respond to the recommendations made by the Arizona Citizen Review Panels (CRP) in the Annual Reports for 2018.

The Department continues to engage in meaningful collaboration with internal and external stakeholders to achieve its mission to successfully engage children and families to ensure safety, strengthen families, and achieve permanency; and its vision that children thrive in family environments free from abuse and neglect. The Department recognizes that community involvement and citizen participation are critical to success. Collaborative initiatives with Citizen Review Panels, and the Department's Parent Advisory Board and Youth Advisory Board, bring the voices of citizens to assist DCS in achieving its strategic goals.

The Department is committed to the strategic goals and initiatives outlined in the DCS SFY 2020 Strategic Plan:

1. Improve timeliness of permanency
2. Increase the placement of children in a family-like setting
3. Improve employee retention through improved supervision
4. Develop and implement the agency IT infrastructure
5. Implement an integrated health plan

We wish to thank each member of the Citizen Review Panels for their commitment and partnership.

Below, please find the Department's responses to the panels' recommendations.

The Adoption Subsidy Panel

The Department gained substantial knowledge from the Citizen Review Panel in regard to adoptive parents' understanding of the Adoption Subsidy Program, its objective, and the benefits it provides. Many panel members were unaware that at the time of the adoption, an adoptive parent can opt out of the monthly maintenance payments, but still be eligible for them later. In addition, members were unaware that when a child qualifies for the Subsidy Program, the child's eligibility includes four categories: Medicaid health care benefits through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), non-reoccurring expenses (usually covering the legal expenses of the adoption), maintenance payments, and special services. The need to increase awareness

among prospective adoptive parents is useful information to the Department, as we continue our work to improve the program and expand the program's ability to support all children in need.

Recommendation 1: Continue to have a tiered structure and provide clear information on the needs of children eligible for each subsidy level.

DCS Response: The Department agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Maintain the existing structure of a higher series of payment for children adopted after the age of 12.

DCS Response: The Department agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation 3: Explain to potential customers of the subsidy program the option to sign a \$0 payment agreement, and that this type of agreement still allows them to receive a rate later, should the needs of the child increase.

DCS Response: The Department agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Revise the payment rates in each category. The panel recommends the Department create five payment rate levels (the full description of the recommended rate levels is available in the Arizona CRP Annual Report).

DCS Response: The Department has determined that it is not feasible to implement this recommendation at this time. Title IV-E requirements include that the subsidy rate shall not be greater than the daily foster care bed rate. Raising the subsidy level would increase the subsidy rate above that of the foster care rate. In order for DCS to implement this recommendation, a budget request and approval is required to support the increase in the daily foster care bed rate, as well as the adoption subsidy rate, as current funding does not support the recommended increases.

The Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS) Panel

Recommendation 1: Expand RPPS training for foster parents. The panel recommends that additional content be added to class 5 of the in-person foster parenting training, which specifically addresses normalcy.

DCS Response: The Department will work with members of the former RPPS CRP and other child welfare partners to review the complete current training content and identify any gaps, specific content additions, and the delivery method and timing for any identified additions.

Currently, material specific to the RPPS is reviewed several times during the DCS Foster Parent College Pre-Service training program. It is first covered during the mandatory online coursework, "Supporting Normalcy in Youth," which falls between meetings #4 and #5 of the training program. A 32 page handout, *Reasonable and Prudent Standard Foster Parent User Guide* is provided during meeting #5. Additionally, a handout entitled *Caregiver Procedures for Reasonable and Prudent Parenting* is provided during meeting #5, and addresses common situations a caregiver

may encounter. There is also time allotted in meeting #5 for a brief review of these concepts and materials, and an opportunity for questions.

Group homes currently provide a 3-hour training on normalcy and RPPS to applicable staff. As part of their licensure and contractual requirements they must have a staff member who has been trained in this topic on staff at all times children are present.

Recommendation 2: Develop specific guidelines about permissible activities that caregivers may allow under RPPS.

DCS Response: The Department will work with members of the former RPPS CRP and other child welfare partners to determine the degree of specificity needed in the guidelines, and to revise the guidelines as needed to support consistent application of the standards that are communicated through training.

Recommendation 3: Provide additional training to DCS Specialists on RPPS.

DCS Response: The Department will work with members of the former RPPS CRP and other child welfare partners to review the current DCS Specialist training content, delivery venues, and schedules to identify specific additional training needs and/or opportunities to support staff to apply the knowledge delivered through training.

DCS created a DCS Specialist mandatory computer based training entitled “Supporting Normalcy of Youth in Care” in August 2017. The training is mandatory for all DCS Specialists. The topic of RPPS is also discussed during initial new hire DCS Specialist classroom training.

Recommendation 4: Collaborate with diverse communities to identify and understand the culture, traditions, and religious practices of all communities.

DCS Response: The Department agrees with this recommendation and is seeking to collaborate with community organizations, providers, youth, and parents to better identify and understand the culture, traditions, and religious practices of all Arizona communities. In 2018, the Department created a Parent Advisory Board that consists of parents who were involved with DCS in the past. The goal of the board is to “actively collaborate with the Arizona Department of Child Safety in building strategic partnerships between birth parents and staff, promoting parent leadership development, and helping expand the meaningful roles and voices throughout the system.” Additionally, the Department has created a Statewide Youth Advisory Board, to hear directly from youth who are currently in out-of-home care or who had previously been in out-of-home care. These two boards will enable the Department to create policy, procedures, and practices that are respectful and demonstrate compassion to the communities served by DCS throughout Arizona.

The Arizona DCS Community Advisory Committee Panel

The DCS Community Advisory Committee produces an annual report in August, after the end of each state fiscal year. The annual report is made available to the public on the Department’s website at: <https://dcs.az.gov/about/oversight>.

The Community Advisory Committee became a Citizen Review Panel in early 2018, with the approval of the committee members. According to the Community Advisory Committee's SFY 2018 annual report, the committee discussed many topics of significant importance to the Department and families of Arizona. Although the committee did not make formal recommendations, the committee did identify areas the Department could address, including the following topics.

Topic 1: During SFY 2018, the Community Advisory Committee reviewed the DCS SFY 2018 Strategic Plan, and determined which goals and objectives included in the DCS Strategic Plan aligned with the sector representation of the stakeholders on the committee. It was determined that the focus of the committee would be to advise DCS in the areas of: mandatory reporters (education), collaboration, and child well-being. It was also determined that the committee would hear presentations on departmental efforts with regard to kinship and prevention. Based on the presentations provided, the committee reached a consensus that DCS was placing a focus and priority on identifying barriers to kinship placement, creating solutions and finding additional ways to support kinship placements, making efforts to improve placement stability, and collaborating with other stakeholders on prevention efforts. The Committee spoke about the need for collaboration in the area of prevention by expanding programs like the CarePortal model within the tribal community.

DCS Response: The Department continues to prioritize kinship placement support, and has included in the SFY 2020 strategic plan an annual objective to increase placement of children in a family-like setting, and an annual initiative to improve supports to kinship families. The DCS Office of Prevention continues to collaborate with community partners to expand prevention programs. The Office of Prevention is currently engaged with prevention community partners in a prevention service needs assessment that will identify opportunities for service expansion.

Topic 2: The committee spoke on many occasions about the need to increase the number of children who are in a family-like setting, preferably kinship placements whenever possible.

DCS Response: The DCS SFY 2020 strategic plan includes a goal to increase the placement of children in a family-like setting, including an objective to improve supports to kinship families.

Topic 3: The Committee heard presentations related to youth who reach the age of majority, or may have entered into a guardianship and are no longer directly under DCS care. Committee members suggested the Department improve the assessments of permanency options for youth and improve the decision-making process in regard to the best permanency options for children.

DCS Response: The DCS SFY 2020 strategic plan includes a goal to improve the timeliness of permanency for children in Arizona foster care, with objectives related to increasing the successful transition to adulthood for youth age 14 and older, and improving the timeliness and appropriateness of permanency goals for children in foster care.

Topic 4: The committee engaged in discussions related to improving DCS Specialists' knowledge of quality child care.

DCS Response: In the summer of 2018, the Department began an initiative to increase the use of quality rated child care providers by DCS Specialists. The program has been introduced into Maricopa County and the South Region, with a plan to roll out the program throughout the state by the end of the year. DCS Specialists are receiving training, and have been introduced to the Department of Economic Security and First Things First search engines to assist them in identifying quality child care providers. The training includes information about Head Start programs, and information on Head Start vacancies is provided to the DCS Specialist seeking child care so the match can be made quickly. As a result of this effort, to date the percentage of foster children in quality child care has increased from 37% to 45%.