

Department of Child Safety Community Advisory Committee

Report of Activities and Recommendations for State Fiscal Year 2016

Background

The Community Advisory Committee was established in June of 2015 by A.R.S. §8-459, “to provide a community forum:

1. to inform the department, analyze current law and policy and make recommendations to improve the ability of the department to increase the safety of children, respond to child maltreatment and ensure the well-being of and timely permanency for children who are referred to and involved in the child welfare system;
2. for collaboration among state, local, community, tribal, public and private stakeholders in child welfare programs and services that are administered by the department; and
3. to improve communication between mandatory reporters and the department.”

The Community Advisory Committee consists of one representative each from fourteen stakeholder groups. The Committee’s membership includes:

Steve Twist, Community Advisory Committee Chair, Vice President and General Counsel of Services Group of America (SGA), representing a child advocacy organization that advocates for or represents children who are victims of crime.

Deborah Burdick, Ed.D., representing schools, with experience in the child welfare system.

Kathryn Coffman, M.D., FAAP, representing medical providers, with a preference for pediatricians, who have experience in diagnosing and treating injuries related to abuse and neglect.

Kay Ekstrom, Founder, Retired CEO, Christian Family Care, representing a faith based organization, with experience in the child welfare system.

Denise Ensdorff, President and CEO, Arizona’s Children Association, representing child welfare agencies that directly provide contracted services to children and their families.

Kris Jacober, foster parent, Executive Director, Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation, representing current or former foster or adoptive parents.

Emily Jenkins, President and CEO Arizona Council of Human Service Providers, Arizona council of Human Service Providers, representing child welfare agencies that directly provide contracted services to children and their families and child advocacy organizations that deal with child welfare system policy issues.

Sacha Loving, Registered Nurse, representing current or former foster or adoptive parents and persons who have experience with children with special needs and the child welfare system.

Chief Jerald Monahan, Chief of Police, representing a law enforcement agency, with experience with the department on cases that involve criminal conduct allegations; and a rural area in this state.

Robin Pearson, Executive Director, Voices for CASA Children, representing volunteers with the foster care review board or court appointed special advocate program.

Nicole Roskens, Clinical Director of Cradle to Crayons Program, Superior Court of Maricopa County Juvenile Division, and Independent Private Practice, Counselor, representing the courts involved in child welfare issues.

Denise Yanibah Hobson Ryan, Deputy Criminal and Civil Prosecutor with Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Office of the Prosecutor, representing a Native American tribe or nation, with experience in the child welfare system.

Tiffany N. Ryan, Assistant Research Professor and Coordinator, Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Project with Northern Arizona University, representing persons with an academic appointment to a state university who conduct research in child welfare services, child maltreatment or child abuse or neglect; and a rural area in this state.

Tascha Spears, Ph.D., RN and Director of Pinal County Attorney's Family Advocacy Centers (Eloy & San Tan Valley, AZ) representing child advocacy centers and child victims of crime.

As required by A.R.S. §8-459, representatives were appointed by the Department of Child Safety's Director and did not receive compensation for their service on the Committee. The statutory requirements of the Committee are to meet at least quarterly, and produce a report of Committee activities and recommendations each fiscal year.

Committee Meeting Dates and Activities

The Committee met six times in SFY 2016 to receive information about current law and policy and review data relevant to the Committee's three statutory requirements. In addition to the call to public and option for executive session, the meeting agendas included a variety of topics aimed at educating and informing committee members:

August 13, 2015

- **Opening Remarks & Introductions**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) Community Advisory Committee Members will introduce themselves to each other as well as to the public and take action to select a chair. Director McKay will discuss his vision of the Committee's goals as they pertain to Arizona Revised Statutes § 8-459.

- **Discussion on Strategic Plan and Possible Action**

Presentation from Director McKay of DCS's 2016 Strategic Plan to the Committee. The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the information they received from the Department on the Strategic Plan, the views and questions raised by members of the Committee and take possible action.

- **Discussion and Possible Action on Issue of Subcommittees**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the possibility of and/or need for forming Subcommittees and may take action to form Subcommittees.

- **Annual report**

The DCS Advisory Committee will discuss the submission of its annual report and may direct staff to prepare the report for their approval at the next meeting.

- **Future Meeting Dates and Items for Future Agendas**

The DCS Advisory Committee may discuss future dates for meetings and direct staff to place matters on future agendas.

- **Executive Session**

The Committee may vote to go into Executive Session for discussion and consultation with the DCS General Counsel regarding agenda items 1-6 above pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3).

September 9, 2015

- **Opening Remarks**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) Community Advisory Committee Members will get an update from Director McKay.

- **Report on Data Requests and Possible Action**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will receive a report on data requests, discuss the data that they received from the Department, and take possible action.

- **Discussion of Strategic Plan and Possible Action**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the information they received from the Department on the Strategic Plan, the views and questions raised by members of the Committee (see attached) and take possible action.

- **Discussion and Possible Action on Issue of Subcommittees**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the possibility of and/or need for forming Subcommittees and may take action to form Subcommittees.

October 13, 2015

- **Opening Remarks**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) Community Advisory Committee Members will get an update from Director McKay.

- **Auditor General Report**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will receive an update on the Auditor General's Performance Audit released September 30th and take possible action.

- **Discussion of Permanency Decision-Making Roles**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the roles of the APM, Supervisors and the Office of the Attorney General in making permanency decisions and take possible action.

- **Discussion of DC Legislative Requests and Specifically Budget Funding Items**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will discuss the requests that DCS made to the legislature regarding items such as the worker retention and prevention items and take possible action.

- **Discussion of DCS's program evaluation efforts to date.**

The DCS Advisory Committee member will discuss information received from the department regarding their evaluation efforts of the Strategic Plan for Quarter 1 and take possible action.

December 10, 2015

- **Opening Remarks**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) Community Advisory Committee Members will get an update from Director McKay on the progress to date at DCS and discuss a response to media reports.

- **Circumstances Surrounding Removal of Children From Home**

The DCS Community Advisory Committee Members will get an update from Katherine Guffey, discuss the circumstances surrounding the removal of children by DCS and take possible action on this item.

- **Strategic Plan Update**

The Community Advisory Committee Members will get an update from Katherine Guffey on the Department's Strategic Plan as well as any of the Committee's recommendation that may now be a part of that plan.

- **Legislative Proposal Updates**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will receive an update from Director McKay regarding the legislative proposals that were submitted and their progress to date (if any)

February 19, 2016

- **Legislative Proposal Updates:**

The DCS Advisory Committee members will receive an update from Director McKay regarding the legislative proposals that were submitted, their progress to date and take possible action on this item.

- **Presentation by Dr. Neil Websdale**

Dr. Websdale will discuss with the DCS Community Advisory Committee members NAU's Family Violence Institute's work with children who witness violence in their home.

- **Community Advisory Committee Recommendations to DCS:**

The Committee members may make recommendations to DCS and may take possible action on this item.

May 6, 2016

- **Presentation of Department Data**
Lela Wendell will present data that reflects the state of DCS.
- **Rulemaking for Child Welfare Agencies:**
Presentation by Carrie Senseman followed by discussion and possible action on the development of new rules covering the DCS's licensing, regulation, and enforcement of standards for child welfare agencies under Title 21, *Child Safety*.
- **Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP):**
Presentation by Katherine Guffey followed by discussion and possible action on the CFSR's recommended Practice Improvement Plan for DCS.
- **Committee's Report**
Discussion and possible action regarding the Committee's report of its activities and recommendations during this fiscal year due by August 15.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Improved Communication

In order for the Committee to fulfill its statutory obligation, the focus for year one was to educate committee members about the department's organization, functions, and procedures, as well as the challenges facing the department, so that thoughtful recommendations could be made. The department shared the following areas of concern: the continuous increase of children in out-of-home care; the volume of incoming reports; delays in service provision; challenges with child welfare capacity and coordination with the courts, behavioral health providers, and other system partners; insufficient foster home capacity; and staff retention. The department made several presentations to the Committee on existing and planned initiatives to address these challenges.

At the time the Committee first convened, the department had recently released the State Fiscal Year 2016 Strategic Plan outlining a comprehensive approach to address urgent issues facing the department. The strategic initiatives in the plan are organized into five strategic goals:

- Improve objective decision-making at the Hotline and in investigations
- Improve performance and quality of service through employee retention
- Reduce length of stay for children in out-of-home care
- Improve capacity to place children in family environments
- Reduce recurrence of maltreatment by improving service delivery

The department also shared the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which closely aligns with the department's strategic plan, but details deliverables in accordance with federal requirements. The CFSR process includes data analysis, case reviews, and stakeholder interviews. All states develop a PIP following the evaluation phase. The department worked with the Federal Children's Bureau to develop the PIP, and asked the Committee for feedback on the plan prior to the finalization of the plan. Four themes for improvement were identified through the evaluation and improvements in these areas will be tracked using the accompanying ten measures outlined below:

1. Child Safety Assessment and Intervention
 - Timely response to reports and in-person contact with victims

- Quality of initial and ongoing safety and risk assessment
 - Sufficiency of safety intervention
2. Family Engagement
 - Child and family involvement in case planning
 - Frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents
 - Frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children
 3. Quality Needs Assessment
 - Quality of general needs assessment
 - Appropriate services provided to meet assessed needs
 4. Timely Permanency
 - Rate of permanency within 12 months of entry
 - Re-entry within 12 months of exit to reunification or guardianship

Actions and Recommendations

In accordance with A.R.S. §8-459, the Committee has summarized several key activities and recommendations that came from the six meetings that were held. The activities and recommendations are organized into the three areas for which the Committee is charged with providing a community forum.

Inform the department, analyze current law and policy and make recommendations to improve the ability of the department to increase the safety of children, respond to child maltreatment and ensure the well-being of and timely permanency for children who are referred to and involved in the child welfare system

Data presented to the Committee by the department shows that approximately 12 percent of children removed return home in seven days or less. In the October 2015 and December 2015 meetings, the Committee raised this issue and asked the department if there is an opportunity to legally and safely offer the family a “cooling-off” period, which may diffuse the situation long enough to mitigate the apparent safety threat. The Department explained that current practice includes the use of in-home and out-of-home safety plans. An in-home safety plan can consist of a parent and their child going to someone else’s home with a monitor who agrees to oversee the safety of the child. An out-of-home safety plan includes separation of the child from the parents. The department may place the child with a relative or other temporary caregiver, but current policy requires that the department take legal custody of the child through an out-of-home dependency or a Voluntary Placement Agreement. DCS previously had policy that allowed the parent to place the child with a person in the family network, without requiring a dependency or Voluntary Placement Agreement. This practice was discontinued, thereby limiting the department’s ability to use a “cooling off period,” and possibly contributing to removals of short duration.

In response to the Committee’s recommendation that the department use a cooling off period, the Department drafted a policy to again allow parents to place their children with a person in the family’s network, for short periods and with department oversight of the child’s safety, and without requiring that the department take or be given legal custody of the child. Specific procedures and monitoring practices have been drafted to ensure the appropriate use of this safety intervention. This safety intervention option allows the department to monitor children in a safe and temporary placement, while engaging with the family to identify services and in-home safety plan options that may prevent the child(ren) from entering foster care.

At the February 2016 meeting, DCS brought forth a pressing issue regarding disagreement with the Arizona Ombudsman Office on the legal interpretation of department's authority to interview children without prior parental consent following a report of child neglect. The Department shared concerns that receiving parental consent prior to interviewing children could compromise the safety and wellbeing of children who are alleged victims of neglect. The Committee requested status updates on the department practice and the release of the Arizona Attorney General's opinion. On March 29, 2016, the Attorney General stated that, "DCS may legally interview children specified in the exception provisions without parental notice as long as doing so is part of a statutorily authorized DCS investigation." With this opinion, the department has been able to continue its investigations practices.

Additional Committee Recommendations:

Collaboration among state, local, community, tribal, public and private stakeholders in child welfare programs and services that are administered by the department

Stakeholder engagement is a critical component to successful collaboration. The Committee members were invited to key stakeholder meetings outside of the formal committee setting. In November 2015, Arizona State University hosted the annual statewide Arizona Citizens Review Panel (CRP) meeting. There are similarities between the Committee and the CRP in that both groups are charged with reviewing DCS policy and procedures and making recommendations to DCS on important improvement areas. A key message at the event centered on meaningful collaboration across child welfare systems and in partnership with the community.

Additionally, in December 2015, the Department hosted the Federal Children's Bureau in Arizona as part of the CFSR process. The Department and the Children's Bureau presented on the CFSR findings and breakout groups were organized to gain insight from stakeholders on the identified areas needing improvement. The Committee was also provided a preliminary draft of the PIP and asked to provide the Department with their feedback and recommendations. The PIP has been finalized and the Department will continue to provide the Committee with routine updates on progress, as well as ask for input where relevant.

Additional Committee Recommendations:

Improve communication between mandatory reporters and the department

One key area of the Department's State Fiscal Year 2016 Strategic Plan was to improve objective decision-making at the Hotline. The deliverables outlined were to revise the Hotline report screening tool, complete a report to propose changes to statute to improve clarifications to report definitions, and dedicate an audit staff to monitor quality assurance at the Hotline.

Over the last two years, the Hotline has undergone a series of process. The streamlining and standardization of processes has resulted in reduced call wait times. These efficiencies are a benefit to mandated reporters who are now able to quickly make their report without spending time on hold. The significant reduction in wait times means that there are fewer dropped, therefore more calls are handled on the first call to the Hotline and screened for child maltreatment.

In February 2016, the Department trained and implemented the revised Hotline Screening Tool. A second revision to the tool was made in April 2016 based on a review of data, and the results of monthly calibrating surveys to measure the consistency of decisions among Intake Specialists at the Hotline. The result of the new Hotline screening tool is clarity of DCS report criteria, specifically around child vulnerability and neglect. Furthermore, legislation was passed allowing the Department to screen out concerns when the alleged abuse or neglect happened more than three years ago, or when the identity or current location of the child victim, the child's family or the person suspected of abuse or neglect is unknown. A standardized protocol has been established at the Hotline to ensure ongoing monitoring of the revised screening process.

Additional Committee Recommendations:

Recommendations for Committee and Department collaboration for the upcoming year

In year two, the Committee intends to take a role in reviewing and providing comments and recommendations on the Department's strategic initiatives. With many improvements in progress and in various stages of planning and implementation, the Committee feels that the most efficient and effective way to support the Department is to analyze and advise on the initiatives included in the State Fiscal Year 2017 Strategic Plan and the CFSR Program Improvement Plan.

Other recommendations discussed:

- I. Identify a clear plan for vetting Committee input
 - a. For example, if a Committee member would like to make a recommendation, how do they bring it to the Committee's attention
 - b. How then does the Committee determine whether there is consensus and make a unified recommendation to the Department
 - c. Perhaps, if a Committee member brings up a good idea, the chair assign to a subgroup
 - d. How can we frame it so that, when a problem with the Child Welfare System is brought up, the response is about the community's ability to respond and assist rather than simply assigning tasks to the Department
- II. Identify a clear plan for addressing community member's input
- III. Identify specific items on which to focus
 - a. CFSR PIP - this seemed to be the area all agreed would be the best place to elicit meaningful feedback
 - b. Strategic Plan
 - c. Trauma Informed Lens