NEBRASKA FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Annual Report 2011

Nebraska Citizen's Review Panel for Child Protective Services

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Introduction

The mission of the Citizen Review Panel Program is to assess the **Child Protective Services** system and make recommendations for continuous improvement that will help ensure the safety and well being of Nebraska children and families.

The Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is but one of the Citizen Review Panel Programs, our participation began in 2010. Citizen Review Panels review Child Protective Services state policies, current practices, pertinent data, and case file information on child fatalities and near fatalities due to maltreatment. The panels evaluate the Child Protective Services relationship with foster care, adoption and other related agencies. The Panels make recommendations to Child Protective Services for system changes and improvements and submit annual reports of activities and goals.

Volunteer panels address important issues related to Child Protective Services (CPS). Volunteers bring an array of experiences and perspectives and provide advocacy for the protection and welfare of children. Panels gather at least every three months (quarterly). **Commitment, Communication, and Cooperation.** These are the essential foundation of any good collaboration between a public agency and citizen volunteers. The political landscape, personalities, and hidden agendas all work against these principles, and each of

these dangers must be dealt with inturn. Seeing the collective knowledge of citizens as an asset, not a threat, is the whole idea behind citizens review panels

Objectives of the NE-FFCMH citizen review panel

- To assist Nebraska Child Welfare System to evaluate the extent to which it is fulfilling its responsibilities in accordance with the state Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) plan.
- To prepare and make available to the public an annual report containing a summary of the activities of the panel.
- To review the consistency of Child Welfare Agency practices and their compliance with stated policies.
- To analyze trends, provide valuable insights that those working within the system might miss, and provide feedback on what is and what isn't working.
- To make recommendations for policy changes as needed.
- To provide outside validation of the achievements of the system and the efforts of agency staff.
- To increase community understanding, ownership and investment in child protection.
- To promote cooperation among community resources and child protective services.
- To advocate for needed resources to achieve the protection of children from abuse and neglect and ensure permanent homes for children in a timely manner.

Membership

The membership of this citizen review panel has geographic representation from all 5 CFS service areas of the state. Members consist of family advocates and youth, family and community members that have experience with Nebraska's child welfare system.

Chair: Candy Kennedy Executive Director Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (NE-FFCMH)

Shared co-chair: Pam Allen Executive Director Nebraska Foster Adoptive Parent Association and Sarah Wonder Executive Assistant (NE-FFCMH)

Cathy Johnson- LMHP
Nyla Christensen- Family Member
Jessica Ozan- Youth
Sara Nicholson- Community Member
Trish Blakely- Executive Director Healthy Families Project
Judy Domina- Executive Director Nebraska Family Support Network
Sharon Dalrymple- Executive Director Families Inspiring Families
Robert Gereaux- Executive Director Parent to Parent network
Andrea Rodriquez- Executive Director Families CARE
Sheri Marchman- Day Executive Director Voices for Families
Janay Bahnsen-Price Executive Director SPEAKOUT
Melanie Lantis- Program manager NE-FFCMH

Panel activities

1) Panel structure and development

Recruit a diverse panel with representation from each service area of the state. Find dates and family friendly times to accommodate the needs of panel members.

2) Develop a clear understanding of the mission and deliverables of a citizen review panel
3) Reviewed current information and data related to Nebraska's Child Protective Services system.
4) Identify process from intake – to discharge. Review state policies and procedures. As Nebraska moves forward with child welfare reform review

communication and policies of the lead agencies to assure consistency and standardization.

5) Began interviewing partners providing services in each of the service areas. As well as "clients" both bio, foster and adoptive parents and youth.
6) Begin to identify areas of focus, and document recommendations and next steps to continue educating panel about Nebraska's system.

Being a young panel and just beginning to grasp Nebraska's model and policies and procedures we understand that we have a great need for further training and education. We end the year with more questions than recommendations. We now have clearer understanding of the direction we intend to pursue. Through many conversations and interviews we have heard antidotal evidence of many strengths and success's in the field. We have identified only 3 recommendations with these we are hopefully for further conversation with CFS for both clarifying as well as collaborating to find solutions if need be.

Recommendations

Intake

1) Address the current challenges associated with staffing at the call center. Typical time for investigation 30-45 days. A large backlog of open investigation cases many are more than 6 months out.

Investigating

2) A clearer Substantiation definition standardized and understood by all service areas. Review of records and interviews would imply we need to do more work in this area.

Reporting

3) Increased monitoring and mandates of timely documentation. As of January 2011 400 cases not finalized from 2009…….not getting paperwork (documentation) in timely.

Next Steps

- Create communication procedure with CFS to request information and data and tools for ongoing training.
- Arrange Tour and presentation of Project Harmony location of hotline/call center.
- We have contacted UNL Center on Children, Families and the Law to schedule training of Nebraska's safety model.
- Meet with Child Advocacy Centers to learn of their role and experiences

Initial questions we have as we proceed forward

Safety and Maltreatment two separate outcomes.

- About 25% of calls are substantiated for maltreatment
- Safety Assessment is Tool used to assess

After Safety Assessment:

- 80% of safe
- 20% unsafe

Could be unsubstantiated but….a safety issue?

If identified as safety concern, will not be on registry for maltreatment?

Data showing:

The difference between maltreatment and safety?

Referrals if unsafe in home or out of home services?

Determination if child is in or out based on safety plan (look at home, it's calm enough for services, family willing to have home services, available resources..expensive to have someone there 24-7) level of intensity. What is the cost of in home services compared to out of home placement? Who gets to decide this????

We have received self reporting from foster parents with concerns of CPS workers monitor behavior check list without foster family input. Not receiving mandatory monthly visits from CPS case workers. Long standing issue of phone calls not being retuned, and confidential information not using secure iron port. We would like to research this more closely.