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Mary Jo Pankoke:

The Department would like to thank all members of the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for Serious Injury and Near Fatality for their time and efforts to support the development of a child welfare response to reduce child abuse and neglect. The Department understands that COVID-19 has negatively impacted the CRP's work this last year resulting in a reduction of case reviews conducted. Although no formal recommendations are provided in the CRP annual report, the Department looks forward to the CRP's work around the highlighted issues for further study. The following letter outlines key activities of the Department in response to topics brought forward by the CRP.

The Department has made note of the concern for the lack of documentation of third-party reports. In January 2021, a Quick Tip was sent to staff on the importance of collateral contacts and how to document collateral information in the case file. Additionally, case closure checklists will be modified to ensure statewide consistency in file contents at case closure. Another avenue for assistance will be contacting the Health Care Oversight Committee which is tasked with ensuring the medical and mental health needs of children are met. The Health Care Oversight Committee will review this action further. The Department is open to adopting innovative strategies to obtain records from third-party agencies as records are not always provided upon Department request.

The Department has increased effort in prevention and is strongly committed to serving families in their communities through the use of community-based interventions. The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) has highlighted the importance of evidence-based practices. Healthy Families America, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, and Child-Parent Psychotherapy are just a few of the services helping Nebraska increase capacity to serve families throughout Nebraska. Additionally, Nebraska has a great foundation through the Community Collaboratives and Central Navigator programs that serve families. The Department's FFPSA plan has been approved and has proposed additional evidence-based practices and work is occurring with Chapin Hall to complete a statewide gap/needs analysis to inform the state on next steps in developing robust service array focused on prevention.

Serving families with chronic needs is often done across multiple agencies. The Department has implemented Safety Organized Practice (SOP) as a mechanism to engage families and communities to create a systemic approach to ensuring the needs of families are met. SOP provides a toolkit that gives staff additional ways to engage families and obtain information that will lead to clearly articulated reasons for Department involvement as well as clearly defined actions that need to be demonstrated to ensure ongoing child safety. SOP is not fully operationalized as of this date due to training requirements and policy revisions. However, the Department foresees SOP as a foundation for all case management to partner with families. Services that have been found effective in family engagement include Family Centered Treatment and Intensive Family Preservation. Family Centered Treatment (FCT) is a service in the Western, Northern, and Central Service Areas that has had great success in engaging families. Nebraska is assessing the possibility of expanding the capacity of FCT in other areas of the state due to consistently successful outcomes. Additionally, Intensive Family Preservation is a service available for those families that are at high risk for removal. The Department is enhancing the Structured Decision-Making tools to ensure an accurate assessment of a family's safety and risk is completed. This is a three-year process lead by Evident Change. Involving stakeholders across the state is critical to support this work and ensure input is received by all parties that may be impacted. Finally, Motivational Interviewing and Reflective Practice are being offered to staff. Both pieces of training enhance staff skills to further engage with families.

The Department continues to expand staff knowledge around best practices. In regards to responding to Domestic and Family Violence, the Department has increased the number of specialized units that will have a deeper understanding of domestic and family violence. The metro areas of the state including Omaha and Lincoln lend themselves to specialization. Recently, Safe and Together Training was offered to 27 supervisors and 62 workers. Where specialization is not feasible staff work closely with, and rely on the expertise of, 19 Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault programs across Nebraska.

The Department looks forward to the continued collaboration and appreciates the work CRP has done and continues to do in reviewing cases pertaining to this vulnerable population.

Sincerely,



Roger Robinson, MS
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