



Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee **2018 12th ANNUAL SORS REPORT**

Proceedings and Findings for the period of July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

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Note: All members listed, status of membership, job titles, and organization affiliations are as of June 30, 2018.

*retired members

**resigned members

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Introduction

On July 11, 2006, P.L. 2006, Chapter 47 was enabled which established the Department of Children and Families (DCF). This law amended numerous statutes in order to transfer a number of functions from the Department of Human Services to this new department, including the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (“Task Force”). The bill also expanded the responsibilities and membership of the Task Force. Further, the law included provisions whereby the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), formerly the Division Youth and Family Services (DYFS), Staffing and Outcome Review Panel established under N.J.S.A. 30:4C-3.1 was dissolved and its roles and functions were assumed by the Task Force through the creation of a Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS).

The charge of the SORS is to review staffing levels of the CP&P in order to develop recommendations regarding staffing levels and the most effective methods of recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff within the CP&P. In addition, the subcommittee was mandated to review CP&P’s performance in the achievement of management and client outcomes and prepare a report of its findings to the Governor and the Legislature.

Subcommittee Proceedings

SORS met on the following dates:

- July 18, 2017;
- September 12, 2017;
- November 21, 2017;
- January 16, 2018; (cancelled)
- March 13, 2018; (cancelled); and
- May 8, 2018

These meetings provided the SORS the opportunity to discuss and assess items associated with their statutorily mandated work.

To view a copy of the meeting minutes please visit www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/boards/njtfcancan/

Summary of Activities and Focus – 2017 to 2018

The charge of the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS) is outlined in the NJTFCAN statute and includes the following:

- Reviewing staffing levels of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P);
- Developing recommendations regarding staffing levels;
- Developing recommendations around the most effective methods of recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff within the division;
- Reviewing the Division’s performance in the achievement of management and client outcomes;
- Reporting annually the Subcommittee’s findings to the Governor and Legislature.

SORS attended to this change by implementing and analyzing its staff survey as well as receiving comprehensive presentations and/or updates from DCF executive staff. These presentations centered around the scope, work and strategic priorities on the following topics:

- Child Fatality Outcomes: DCF Five Year Analysis of Child Fatalities
- CQI Staff Development: Manage by Data Fellows Program
- Family and System Outcomes: Child and Family Services Review

Priorities of the SORS

Summary of work for 2018. SORS convened its body during the past year, four times (two cancellations were due to weather and administrative reorganization).

In our 2017 meetings we focused on a number of areas agreed upon in our previous work plan.

Staff Survey Follow Up

One of our areas of focus predicated upon our survey and the Rutgers staffing survey completed in 2016 was on the needs of children and families and the ability of staff to connect families to needed services and resources. DCF staff discussed with us the development of the Office of Strategic Development to work within the department to identify the greatest needs as it relates to supporting children and families from a service perspective. This includes key areas in terms of housing, substance abuse services and visitation services. Legacy and duplicative contracts were reviewed to either terminate if need be or re-structure and support or expand new contracts. Members highlighted an example of the shift of focus that DCF is embarking on with the DV Liaisons and how that is seen through Legal Services as a support to the families they work with.

Also reviewed was the Workforce Report regarding the race and ethnicity of staff, which contained statewide statistics and not necessarily local or county-based. Discussions were had about potentially prioritizing the matching of staff that are culturally competent to meet the needs of the family, while also attempting to match staff to family's needs. It was also highlighted that cultural competence is looked at from multiple perspectives and the staff can access a list of cultural competence trainings through the Training Academy.

The group also spent time discussing the safety initiatives that DCF has undertaken in the last year to insure the safety of staff, these included: lobby guards, armed security guards, electronic wands, etc.

Child Fatality Report

The team had an extensive presentation on the DCF findings of a five-year analysis of child fatalities as recommended by the National Commission to Eliminate Child Fatality. The presentation was made by former DCF Deputy Commissioner, Joe Ribsam who provided the preliminary results and recommendations from the five-year analysis of 109 fatality cases. Mr. Ribsam discussed that child fatality investigations take a long time due to the dual nature between child welfare investigations and law enforcement who take the lead. Part of the process included a deeper case review to gather other data elements regarding social issues such as socio-economic status, substance use, medical and educational data on the family and specific child fatality incident.

The demographic data revealed that there were 109 children, 107 incidents with 131 perpetrators. In terms of age, the majority of children were under the age of 2 (81 of 109) with males being at higher risk than females. Race and ethnicity did not show much disparity. One interesting subcategory that was looked at was disability. Twenty-eight out of 109 children (about 20 percent had a documented disability, which is a higher than the general population.

The next area in the review looked at the child fatalities where there were prior allegations (not findings) of abuse and neglect. Out of the 109 cases, 33 children had prior allegations where 76 did not have any prior allegations.

Family environment data revealed that the assumption that the majority of child fatalities occur in single parent household was not founded through the case review: 58 out of 109 children were part of a two parent household and another 30 were found to be living with a single primary parent and a co-parenting adult household member (such as a relative or significant other); 17 were living in a single parent household and 4 were with another caregiver (such as foster care or private arrangement by family). The assumption usually falls to the paramour of a mother however the data revealed that the majority of perpetrators were a biological parent, majority being the mother or female caregiver.

Reviewers also looked at reported history of substance misuse and/or illegal substance use. Sixty of the 131 perpetrators had documented reported history of substance misuse and/or illegal substance use.

In terms of the use of ancillary social service agencies, for 93 of the 131 perpetrators there was no documented data available again suggesting that investigators may not view this information relevant to the investigation. Of the ones where information was available, the majority were receiving multiple social supports such as Medicaid, TANF, food stamps and WIC suggesting that there is an important role for county Board of Social Services in partnering with recommendations.

Lessons learned: The team at DCF is using this look back as an opportunity to look at a number of areas and determined that data collection is an area to focus on; the majority of victims are very young children and the majority of cases are not known to the child welfare system so we need to look at the broader system partners. These families also have a lot of stressors and risk factors. Reporting inconsistencies were also seen- for example law enforcement responding to domestic violence reports with children present and then not making a report to child welfare as is required by law.

DCF is looking to modify two Administrative Orders to help strengthen case review processes. Mr. Ribsam discussed having the broader system partners understand the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework to give them a basic framework of what a strong family is, how to identify those that are lacking protective factors and where to refer them so they can receive benefits. Discussion was held around the other system partners such as entitlement agencies, law enforcement, education and other medical professionals like family practices and pediatricians to have knowledge on how to assist families. It was suggested targeting home visiting and WIC staff for training as well.

Data Fellows

An extensive overview of the Data Fellows program was given to SORS. The Manage by Data Fellows Program Administrator, Abbie Dimeo outlined the DCF data culture, which is continuous quality improvement (CQI) and highlighted some areas in which DCF is implementing CQI. Abbie discussed how DCF is committed to data transparency through the use of publically available data reports, such as the Commissioner's Monthly Reports, which provides a snapshot of NJ child welfare data.

It was presented that the Data Fellows Program targets middle management staff to have them identify existing knowledge, create new knowledge and become champions of change. Staff is exposed to different types of data such as:

- Point in time data such as how many children are in placement
- Process data such as how many investigations or case plans were completed
- Outcome data such as repeat maltreatment
- Qualitative Data such how is safety in home rated in terms of strength or area needing improvement

Some specific projects and findings were presented; such as children with successful permanency were more likely to have formal supports present at Family Team Meetings than children with unsuccessful permanency. Another finding helped identify a service gap in a specific county. This information was used to advocate the need for and the opening of a Family Success Center in Passaic County. Another fellow finding helped address short stays in placement in Monmouth County by partnering with the Administrative Office of the Courts for access to the Family Automated Case Tracking System to conduct searches for missing parents/family members prior to placing any child in an unrelated resource home. This access is being extended in other counties. There was a lengthy hearty discussion regarding placement with relatives versus legal custody given to relatives through the court system and best practices for both the court system and CP&P.

The presentation concluded with program lessons learned such as what was successful and challenging as well as the program overall impact to DCF. It was stressed that the teaching of the program is to not make the fellows participants work easier but gives them a greater understanding of how the work impacts the children and families.

Leadership Change

The committee reconvened in the New Year which was preceded by a change in the leadership at DCF. The committee spent time sharing some of the focus and messaging that was coming out of the new administration and we were energized by the new Commissioner's focus on hearing from children, youth and families who are involved in the system, highlighting the need for trauma informed self-care for the staff of DCF and CP&P and the emphasis on disproportionality and disparity which is high in NJ.

Child and Family Services Review

Dawn Marlow, DCF Federal Reporting Coordinator and SORS Staff Support, conducted a presentation on New Jersey's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). This review process

is a collaborative effort between the Children's Bureau and a state, tribe or territory to look at strengths and areas needing improvement in the child welfare system which includes the court system. The review process includes a Statewide Assessment, an onsite case review to include stakeholder interviews to inform safety, permanency and wellbeing outcomes and finally the Program Improvement Plan for every identified outcome or factor not found in substantial conformity.

NJ conducted a traditional review in July 2017. This included a case review of 65 cases in three counties across the state as well as 21 focus groups of relevant stakeholders to include but not limited to birth parents, resource parents, youth, service providers and judicial representatives.

Results from the review highlighted many strengths such as strong safety practice at the investigative stage, commitment to continuous quality improvement, preservation of family connections for children in care to include placement stability, strong coordination of services for families and the assurance that children's educational, physical and mental health needs were met. The review also highlighted several areas needing improvement, including ongoing safety and risk assessment, planning and service provision; engagement and assessment of parents, particularly fathers, which impacts individualization of services and lack of concurrent planning and other efforts by both DCF and the courts to achieve timely permanency.

Specific safety areas that were identified as needing improvement were safety services not aligning or meeting the level of need to assure safety and on-going safety and risk assessments were either missing or not comprehensive as it related to:

- Non-custodial households
- Fathers
- Older children
- Adult siblings

In terms of areas of permanency, placement stability was a major strength for NJ with 97.5 percent of cases were identified as having a stable placement. However, case planning to achieve goals was more sequential as opposed to concurrent, late identification of adoption goals led to delays in filing termination of parental rights (TPR) complaints/petitions and judicial backlogs delayed timely permanency.

While periodic reviews and permanency hearings were held timely, engagement of parents in case planning, filing of TPR petitions, and caregiver notice and right to be heard in court proceedings varied statewide. Through some root cause analysis to include post-CFSR focus groups, we learned that comprehensive case planning requires enhanced engagement strategies for staff, especially with fathers. Another area cited is that in some counties, CP&P relies on the courts to approve the goal change to adoption before filing for TPR when that is not necessary. DCF and AOC data systems interface is very limited and while notice of placement and notice of change goes from NJS directly to the courts- it is a one-way interface. Caregiver post CFSR focus groups identified that notification of hearings from the courts is either not timely or non-existent. Lastly permanency data analysis to determine barriers, especially around timely scheduling of guardianship proceedings, which is to occur in 6 months, and appeals is cumbersome.

Noted strengths for wellbeing included quality assessments were made for caregivers and children to address their needs and that children when appropriate were involved in their case planning. However, comprehensive assessment of needs and services for parents were often missed—especially for fathers who were also often left out of case planning. There was a difference in the frequency and quality of visits between workers and mothers versus workers and fathers. There was also a difference regarding in-home case practice and out-of-home case practice.

The PIP process begins upon the receipt of the final CFSR report. NJ DCF engaged in a five step PIP development process. This included in-depth review of the CFSR results and root cause analysis, review of quantitative administrative data and qualitative data such as Qualitative Review findings, CP&P case reviews, structured feedback from broad spectrum stakeholder focus groups and local CQI teams. Through this process 3 overarching focus goals were developed:

- Ensure that children remain safely in their own home whenever possible
- Improve the quality of child welfare case practice in New Jersey, particularly around engagement and assessment of parents
- Improve timeliness of permanency for children entering foster care in NJ

Strategies and implementation steps are still in the developmental stage and NJ DCF along with the courts continue to partner and collaborate with the Children’s Bureau in finalizing the PIP.

Issues for Follow-Up in 2018 - 2019

The subcommittee identified the following priorities for in the upcoming year as it relates to the CFSR as well as impact by Family First. These areas are in alignment with the vision of the new DCF Administration and will encompass facets of the shift in the focus to prevention.

1. Request presentation from DCF leadership on the DCF priorities and implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act.
2. Request a presentation from the Office of Strategic Development: related to the changes available to resources for families and accessibility to staff
3. Request CSOC presentation/update of the transfer of substance abuse services to CSOC
4. Request update from CP&P Office of Resource Families on the recruitment and retention plan and progress to date
5. Request an update from the Office of Training and Professional Development on the electronic learning management system as well as new training initiatives
6. Presentation from CP&P on the implementation of solution focused case planning
7. Review staff training on cultural competence/humility

SORS will explore these issues to determine what oversight will be necessary to ensure that the improvements being achieved now are sustained for years to come to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable children.