



# DC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**JULY 1, 2017 TO APRIL 30, 2018**

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## Executive Summary

### BACKGROUND

This report presents recommendations from the DC Citizen Review Panel for Child Abuse and Neglect (CRP) to the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). The report covers a ten-month period, rather than a full year, to meet the Panel's statutory timeline.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The full report provides details on the following key recommendations:

1. Update the existing CFSA policy on in-home services to families, which dates from 2010 with 2012 revisions.
2. Create and routinely generate more robust data reports that will support better evaluation of the new in-home services model.
3. Improve monitoring of the quality and effectiveness of the referrals and services provided to families.
4. Consistently pursue community papering in all high-risk cases in which it is needed.
5. For services to youth who are aging out of foster care, clarify how CFSA will monitor/assess the effectiveness of its contract with the Young Women's Project with respect to preparing youth for independence. How will CFSA compare the current arrangements against previous efforts? At CFSA, who is performing quality assurance, as opposed to contract adherence, and how?
6. Require the Young Women's Project to present a draft evaluation tool for individual clients. The tool should illustrate the progress of youth in moving forward on the "spectrum of growth" for independent living and self-sufficiency.

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7. Assign one CFSA staff member to oversee and be fully accountable to the CFSA Director for the effective implementation of the Young Women's Project contract.
8. Track the situations of children who have been evaluated as abused or neglected and placed informally with kin caregivers, rather than being placed in foster care.
9. Evaluate the social service, financial, and legal needs of diverted children and kin caregivers and whether they are being appropriately addressed.

## Introduction

The DC Citizen Review Panel for Child Abuse and Neglect is a volunteer group of DC residents providing oversight of the District's child welfare services. Eight of the CRP's fifteen members are appointed by the Mayor, and seven are appointed by the Council. The CRP is a federally-mandated body, and it is established under District of Columbia law.<sup>1</sup> The CRP's major responsibility is preparation of an annual report making recommendations for improving child welfare services. The Child and Family Services Agency is legally required to reply to the recommendations.

The CRP currently has two working groups. One group addresses services provided to children in their homes, in contrast to services provided in foster care. The other working group addresses services to youth who are aging out of foster care.

At its quarterly meetings, the CRP often hears from outside speakers and invites them to share recommendations, which the CRP itself may endorse.<sup>2</sup>

This report has three major sections: In-Home Services, Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, and Kinship Care. A conclusion offers final forward-looking thoughts.

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. §5106a; D.C. Code §4-1303.51.

<sup>2</sup> During this reporting period, the outside speakers were: Dr. Heather Stowe, Principal Deputy Director, CFSA; Dr. Judith W. Meltzer, Executive Vice President, Center for the Study of Social Policy, who serves as the court-appointed Monitor in LaShawn v. Bowser; and Nadia Gold-Moritz, Executive Director, Young Women's Project. In May 2018, the outside speaker was Stephanie McClellan, Deputy Director of the DC KinCare Alliance.

## In-Home Services Working Group

CFSA has reported that 62% of children it serves are now being served in the home.<sup>3</sup> Due to this high number, it is vital for the CRP to assess in-home services. In 2017 the CRP established the In-Home Working Group. We will be monitoring changes in CFSA's in-home practice for their impact on children and families receiving services in their homes.

The working group plans to look at three areas of in-home services: 1) the Policy and Practice Model, 2) Outcomes and, 3) Quality of Services.

In FY 2017, CFSA changed its approach to in-home services. Some of these changes address which clients are served by CFSA's In-Home units as opposed to staff of the outside collaboratives. While both sets of staff are housed at the collaboratives, CFSA in-home staff work directly for CFSA, and their clients have CFSA cases.

CFSA recently implemented a Levels of Care approach. This approach categorizes families in three groups based on their risk levels gauged by CFSA's risk assessment tool. The risk level drives the number of contacts per month of the family with CFSA staff and the length of time a case is expected to remain open. The agency also adopted a new case transfer process between Child Protective Services and the collaboratives (including In-Home Services). In addition, CFSA made some changes to the array of services.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Define and document policy/practice model.** The current in-home policy dates from 2010, with some 2012 revisions. Given the many changes to in-home cases and practices, we recommend that CFSA update the policy. Changes are needed to provide clarity on the various levels of care and how they differ based on risk and need. The updated policy should clearly state the differences between the levels, including visitation

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<sup>3</sup> Source: CFSA tweet on April 18, 2018. "Over the past six years, CFSA has emphasized helping families to stay together whenever possible. Today, we are monitoring 62 percent of the children we serve in their birth homes because of the agency's commitment to prevention services and family support." Available at [https://twitter.com/DCCFSA?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/DCCFSA?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)

and case closure expectations. Additionally, we recommend that the revised policy include language and guidance on engaging families and the processes and tools social workers can use to help with engagement and make case progress.

2. **Create more robust data reports.** CFSA should routinely generate data reports that provide the feedback needed to assess the functioning of the new in-home model. Existing data reports that CFSA provided to the CRP do not answer critical questions related to the program. We recommend that CFSA make the following changes and additions to its management reports:

- a. **Generate separate reports for clients served by collaboratives and clients served by CFSA.** CFSA needs to analyze data separately for services provided by the collaboratives and those provided by the agency's own in-home social workers. The management reports that CFSA has shared with the working group combined all clients served out of the collaboratives, regardless of which staff provided services. CFSA should break down the data, because in-home services are implemented by different agencies and for different populations. Grouping them together makes it impossible to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of CFSA's In-Home services.
- b. **Generate data by service level.** CFSA needs to generate reports that provide process and outcome data separately for the three levels of service: intensive, intermediate and graduate. It is important to see what services are provided to the three risk groups and what outcomes they experience.
- c. **Generate reports that follow each client from case opening to case closure and beyond.** CFSA is currently collecting some point-in-time data and some data that follows clients within a quarter between referral and case transfer. However, the agency needs to follow clients over a longer periods of time — at least a year — from case opening. Data should be available to show:
  - a) How many clients received one, two, or more contracted services
  - b) How many completed their service plans
  - c) How many cases were closed for reasons other than case plan completion
  - d) How many clients were re-reported to Child Protective Services during the open case

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- e) How many were reported to Child Protective Services after case closure (within the year following case closure)
- f) How many had their case re-opened after case closure (within a year following case closure)
- g) How many had a child enter foster care (during open in-home case or within a year of case closure) and
- h) Recurrence of abuse (during open in-home case or within a year of case closure).

d. **Collect data on specific services.** CFSA should collect process and outcome data on specific services, including Parenting Education and Support Services, PASS, Family Peer Coaching, and Mobile Crisis Stabilization. Data should show how many families began the service, how many completed the service successfully, how many were re-reported, and how many children were placed in foster care.

3. **Monitor the quality of referrals and services.** An additional area of importance is whether case plans and services are appropriate to meet families' needs. CFSA should formally review cases to determine if families are receiving appropriate services. According to CFSA staff, cases are currently being reviewed through QSR, managerial review of supervisory notes, and a new process of case presentations by social workers. The CRP recommends that these review processes be formally defined. Criteria might include, for example: triggers for a review of notes/case presentations; frequency of reviews; number of cases being reviewed; use of a tool or guide for notes/case presentation; and the outcome or process for findings with concerns with casework. The In-home Working Group is planning to design and conduct a review of in-home cases within the next calendar year. We look forward to the collaboration and support of CFSA in this process.

4. **Utilize the Community Papering Policy.** CFSA's community papering policy should be utilized as a tool in high-risk cases to strengthen family involvement in case planning and services. The current policy states that one of the two goals of community papering is to "promote family engagement in safety and case planning with parents who, despite the best efforts of the case management team, have been unwilling to engage."



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CFSA should ensure that it is using this tool in all instances in which it is appropriate and needed.

## Working Group on Young Adults Aging Out of Foster Care

In 2014 the CRP established its Working Group on Young Adults Aging Out of Foster Care in response to a persistent problem in the District's child welfare system — far too many youth “emancipating” out of foster care at age 21 are unprepared for adult life and self-sufficiency. CFSA lacks authority itself to continue direct services to foster care youth once they reach the age of 21. In 2014 CFSA referred emancipating youth to one of five independent non-profit organizations, all operating together under an umbrella group of “Family Support Collaboratives.” The five collaboratives received contracts from CFSA to provide social services to emancipated youth.

For several years the working group (originally termed a task force) examined the efforts of the collaboratives and ultimately made recommendations to CFSA. Perhaps motivated, at least in part, by the CRP's recommendations, the CFSA Director undertook a significant effort to gather all involved stakeholders to launch a thorough examination of the Aftercare Services effort. The end result of this year-long examination was total revision of the model for providing services to these young adults.

Effective February 2017, the Young Women's Project (YWP) organization was awarded a one-year contract, with four following option years, to be the sole provider of services to all youth who emancipate out of the CFSA foster care system. YWP is now charged with offering a comprehensive capacity-building and youth-development based program. The organization anticipates providing a broad range of support, including skills-building, support groups, jobs, individual coaching, and community support connections. The program design, outcomes, benchmarks, and methods align closely with the CFSA's “Transition to Adulthood Outcomes and Benchmarks” which the agency adopted in January 2016.

Allowing start-up time for YWP, the working group began its fact-finding work in the fall of 2017. As requested, CFSA Director Brenda Donald called a meeting of all CFSA staff involved and key stakeholders on October 3, 2017. Thereafter, the working group began meeting with various individuals with YWP and CFSA. YWP has expressed its

determination to provide quality services to the young adults, focusing on the goals and objectives defined by the young adults themselves. YWP is making herculean efforts to provide evidence-based programs. YWP designed very detailed spreadsheets to help the staff and the youth focus on their progress towards achieving stated objectives. The working group applauds this effort.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group offers the following recommendations:

5. Clarify how CFSA will monitor/assess the effectiveness of the YWP contract with respect to preparing youth for independence - particularly compared to previous arrangements (CASA, Collaboratives). Who is doing quality assurance (as opposed to contract adherence) and how?
6. Recommend that CFSA require YWP to present a draft evaluation tool for individuals illustrating the progress of youth moving them forward on the "spectrum of growth."
7. Recommend that the Director assign one staff person to oversee and be fully accountable to the Director for the effective implementation of the YWP contract.

UPDATE: At a subsequent meeting with the working group on May 16, 2018, Director Donald and key CFSA staff demonstrated their continuing commitment to improving services to youth aging out of foster care. They discussed various steps already underway to advance several of these recommendations, which the working group had shared with them in advance of the meeting.

## Kinship Care

The Citizen Review Panel received a briefing from the DC Kincare Alliance on March 6, 2018, regarding a practice commonly known as “informal kinship diversion.”

Specifically, we understand that this occurs when CFSA substantiates abuse or neglect of a child, determines the child cannot remain safely at home with parents, and drafts a safety plan that provides for the child to live informally with relatives rather than placing the child in foster care.

Given that at any time a parent may choose to retrieve the child from these informal care arrangements with relatives, even if the parent has not addressed the issues that led to the abuse or neglect, these already traumatized children are at risk of future harm.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Accordingly, we offer two recommendations:

8. At a minimum, CFSA should report on the number of children who are diverted to kin each year, as well as on the number of diverted children who later come into the system due to abuse or neglect. CFSA may need to develop new database tracking fields to identify these children. At the end of each year, CFSA should furnish a report to the Council and the CRP that sets forth the results of the information gleaned from the above tracking and monitoring and describes plans to enhance the safety and security of diverted children.
9. We also encourage CFSA to evaluate the social service, financial, and legal needs of diverted children and kin caregivers and whether the needs are being appropriately addressed.

## Looking Ahead

The District's child welfare services will soon be undergoing changes driven by federal and local factors.

In February 2018, the federal government adopted new legislation of historic proportion.<sup>4</sup> Known informally as "Family First," the law makes the most significant changes in federal child welfare funding in 35 years. Family First places greater emphasis on in-home services, children in birth families, and kinship placements. We look forward to examining CFSA's plans responsive to the new federal law.

The end of federal court oversight of the District's child welfare system may be the most significant change on the local horizon. For thirty years, a federal court has monitored CFSA's service to District children. A federal monitor has assisted the court in closely tracking the agency's progress in meeting dozens of performance criteria. The litigation, LaShawn v. Bowser, may conclude within the next several years. This will be a cause for celebration. It also raises the question "What then?" The CRP hopes to work with many partners, including CFSA, to ensure continuing and effective monitoring of the quality of the District's child welfare services.

We invite reactions from all readers of this annual report.

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<sup>4</sup> The Family First Prevention Services Act, is part of Division E in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (H.R. 1892). It was signed into law on February 9, 2018.

## Appendix

### **Citizen Review Panel for Child Abuse and Neglect - Membership as of April 30, 2018**

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Emily Smith Goering, Vice Chairperson

Rick Bardach, Treasurer

Sherrill Taylor

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