



**The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group**

**Second Progress Report of the Evaluation of the**

**Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare System**

**March 1, 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (CWG) issues this progress report as an assessment of the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS). CWG issued its first DCS progress report February 1, 2018. In this report, CWG describes activities its undertaken over the past month, raises issues brought to light by the assessment and outlines activities yet to be completed.

## **II. Assessment Activities Completed**

### ***DCS Personnel and Stakeholder Interviews***

Since January 3, CWG reviewers spoke with 141 people during the course of 99 interviews. Interviewees include:

- DCS' central office personnel
- Representatives of Indiana executive branch agencies who serve DCS families and children
- Leaders of multiple non-profit service agencies
- Legislators
- Judges
- DCS staff, providers, and other stakeholders in Vanderburgh County
- DCS staff in Marion County
- Court personnel
- Foster and adoptive parents
- Foster youth
- Medical professionals
- Legal professionals

### ***Data and Other Documents***

CWG collected quantitative data from the DCS' information system. Other activities include:

- The submittal of requests for data indicators related to DCS personnel and case outcomes
- A review of Indiana data found in the 2016 federal report entitled *Child Maltreatment*
- A review of the 2015 *Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect* report

CWG will issue its overall findings and recommendations for improvement in its final report.

## **III. Noted Strengths and Challenges**

CWG based the points discussed in this section on work completed to date. CWG will offer official conclusions and recommendations in its final report in June 2018. CWG's data collection thus far suggests the following strengths and challenges for DCS:

## *Strengths*

- **Atmosphere of hope:** Many interviewees expressed optimism about DCS' new leadership and a renewed interest from state leaders. Interviewees specifically remarked on opportunities to improve agency performance and outcomes for children and families.
- **Dedicated and hard-working caseworkers and supervisors:** Interviewees who have professional associations with DCS described predominantly positive experiences with the department's front-line staff. Interviewees specifically mentioned responsiveness and positive intent when expounding upon their working relationships with the front-line staff.
- **Collaborative relationships with state agencies:** Interviewees praised DCS for its central office level partnerships with other state agencies namely the Department of Education, Department of Correction and the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services. Interviewees credit these collaborations with improving educational and permanency outcomes for children in foster care. The collaboration also contributed greatly to the provision of treatment services and community reintegration for youth in the correctional system.

## *Challenges*

- **DCS legal representation:** Interviewees question whether a sufficient number of experienced attorneys work at DCS to ensure timely and appropriate court processes are conducted. DCS reportedly shifted several years ago from contracting with private law firms to having agency-employed attorneys, a system used by many child welfare agencies around the country. Attorneys from neighboring jurisdictions often cover workloads when vacancies occur. Interviewees suggest this practice leads to delays in filings and requests for delays of court hearings. This negatively impacts a child's movement toward permanency and resolution for families.
- **Qualifications and preparation of DCS case managers and supervisors:** Interviewees question whether child welfare front-line staff possess adequate knowledge and skills. Educationally, Family Case Managers and first-line supervisors are required to have a baccalaureate degree in any field and must complete 15 semester hours or 21 quarter hours of courses which DCS considers to be job-related. DCS provides new employees with twelve weeks of pre-service training and new employees are also assigned mentors who oversee any casework performed during the training period.

- **Customer service from local DCS offices:** Interviewees mentioned being unable to reach staff in local offices despite numerous calls and/or emails. CWG will explore this claim further as reviewers visit county offices in the coming weeks.
- **Shortage of services overall and, particularly, of mental health and substance abuse treatment resources throughout the state:** Interviewees both inside and outside of DCS expressed the need for more widely distributed, better funded treatment services. CWG heard reports of an extreme shortage of qualified therapeutic service providers, especially in rural areas and in families served by child welfare who often benefit most from in-home interventions. Interviewees said that competition for qualified clinicians is so great that provider agencies have difficulty hiring and retaining them. Further, most clinicians prefer to do office-based work because the conditions and salary are better. Additionally, DCS currently uses a pure case management model in which the role and workload of front-line staff is not viewed as including direct service delivery. Thus, DCS relies heavily on external providers to offer non-therapeutic supportive services needed by many families.
- **Centralization of decision-making authority in DCS:** Interviewees both inside and outside of DCS questioned the extent to which decision-making authority currently resides at central office. Some view the over centralization of authority as creating unnecessary work for front-line staff. The documentation and steps involved in the approval process can slow, if not completely block, an effective response to child and family needs. CWG will explore this issue further when visiting with front-line staff in the five regions.

#### IV. Next steps

CWG evaluators will conduct the following activities during the next two and a half months:

- Complete a detailed review and analysis of quantitative data reflecting case processes and outcomes in DCS
- Complete a review of workforce and workload data reflecting:
  - Turnover of front-line staff
  - Caseloads
  - Supervisor to caseworker ratio by service area
  - Front-line staff salaries and salary ranges
- Survey front-line staff to determine field (i.e., social work/non-social work) and level of education
- Shadow family case managers and supervisors in the five selected regions
- Complete stakeholder interviews in the five selected regions
- Code and analyze all interview data to identify predominant, cross-cutting themes
- Review selected materials from a sample of case records
- Review quality assurance reports
- Complete analysis of agency policy and practice guidance

- Complete a review of relevant Indiana statutes and compare them with surrounding states and selected states having equal or greater prevalence of substance abuse based on U.S. Centers for Disease Control indicators

### ***Planning and Scheduling***

CWG continues to seek information from resources in five regions (Region 1 – Lake County; Region 4 – Allen County; Region 10 – Marion County; Region 16 – Vanderburgh County; Region 18 – Clark County). These counties represent different parts of the state and gradations between urban and rural settings. During March, we will turn our attention towards interviews and the direct observation of casework in the five regions. CWG team members will spend one week visiting each selected region. Groups to be interviewed include:

- DCS personnel
- Foster parents
- Parents
- Youth
- Service Providers
- Representatives of the courts and legal system
- Representatives of advocacy organizations
- Representatives who interact with the child welfare system through their professions such as educators, law enforcement officials, and medical professionals

In addition to interviews, the CWG team will spend a day shadowing front-line staff. The CWG team desires broad input for its report and will also contact counties neighboring those listed above.

CWG staff continue to experience openness from participants during the review process. Themes are beginning to emerge and CWG will continue to present those themes and other information during the review process.

### **V. Final Report**

The final report will be provided to the Office of the Governor and the Director of DCS by June 21, 2018.

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