



**THE**  
**CHILD WELFARE**  
**POLICY & PRACTICE** **GROUP**

**The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group**

**Initial Progress Report on the Evaluation of the Indiana Department of**

**Child Services Child Welfare System**

**February 1, 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (CWG) was contacted by the Office of the Governor of Indiana in December 2017 with a request to develop a proposal for conducting a review of the Department of Child Services (DCS) child welfare functions.

The Office of the Governor was interested in securing an independent assessment of DCS that would:

- Examine the current performance of the agency and compare to generally accepted national practice standards and outcome measures;
- Identify prominent strengths and challenges; and
- Produce recommendations for changes in any areas needing improvement.

A plan of work was created and evaluation activities began on January 3, 2018.

## **II. Scope of the Evaluation**

The Child Welfare Group's approach to conducting a review of the Indiana Department of Child Services will be composed of a variety of methodologies, which include the following:

- A series of stakeholder interviews
- Data analysis (outcomes and process measures) and technology assessment
- Organizational capacity assessment
- Identification of resource needs
- Review of the workforce environment
- Policy review
- Assessment of the service and contract array and capacity
- Placement resource availability assessment
- Examination of front-line decision-making including decisions related to removal and case planning

## **III. Evaluation Approach**

The system appraisal will include the following areas:

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

There will be a broad series of stakeholder interviews with youth and families served by the system, community-based organizations linked to the Department, advocacy organizations, public and private providers of treatment and placement services, foster and adoptive parents, legal partners (including judges and key court personnel such as court case managers), law enforcement, mandated reporter groups such as education and medical professionals, front-line caseworkers, and supervisors, managers and system leadership. Other groups may be added once the review gets underway. Input from these diverse stakeholders will help to identify the strengths and challenges of interagency relationships, service provision, business practices and workforce capacity.

### ***Information System, Data and Trend Analysis***

The information system(s) and data and trend analysis will be an important focus of the evaluation process. Both outcome data and internal management data will be examined to assess the achievement of safety, permanency, and well-being for children served, compliance with current policies and procedures, and the value of selected metrics related to improved performance. Among the key measures to be examined are:

**Intake/Investigation:**

- Number of reports accepted, screened out
- Number of investigations by disposition (founded, unfounded, removals/placements, referrals to in-home services)
- Reasons related to removals
- Number of re-referrals and findings
- Timeliness of investigations and disposition
- Number and characteristics of child fatalities or near-fatalities

**In-home services:**

- Number of families served
- Length of service
- Nature and frequency of case contacts
- Disposition (services completed, removals, withdrawals, unable to locate)
- Rates of re-referral

**Out of home care:**

- Number of children in placement by age, gender, race/ethnicity, placement reason(s)
- Placement settings (kinship, congregate care, unrelated foster family)
- Placement stability
- Permanency goals
- Length of stay and rates of exit to permanency by child and placement characteristics
- Re-entries by child and placement characteristics
- Frequency and nature of contacts with parents/caregivers
- Distribution and number of available placement settings

**Workforce Measures**

- Workload trends by service area (intake, investigation, in-home services, foster care/adoption)
- Average vacancy rates of front-line positions and time required to fill positions and achieve full case carrying capacity
- Number/percentage of personnel by service area having more than one year, more than two years of experience
- Supervisor to caseworker ratio by service area
- Workforce characteristics (experience, education)

### ***Organizational Structure and Capacity***

In conducting the review, The Child Welfare Group will gather facts and impressions about current structure and organizational capacity which will include resource sufficiency, workforce responsiveness, business processes, technology, training, quality assurance/quality improvement, and managerial practices.

### ***Identification of Resource Needs***

An analysis of resource needs will include budget trends, workloads and caseloads, referral practices and resource accessibility, provider and resource payment rates, and federal revenue utilization.

### ***Review of Policies and Procedures***

Child welfare policies, licensing standards and contract performance expectations and processes will be reviewed.

### ***Staffing***

DCS staffing levels will be analyzed. CWG will assess caseload and workload levels, focusing on actual caseloads among front-line case-carrying staff and distribution of caseloads across counties. Within the workload analysis, the review will also assess the relevance of tasks and activities to desired outcomes. For example, are staff tracking and documenting data that materially strengthen outcomes? Do levels of management or approvals add value? Stakeholder interviews and caseworker shadowing approaches will materially identify structural and other strengths and impediments. As part of this process CWG will seek to identify opportunities to adjust staffing to improve outcomes, assess duplication and identify strategies to improve retention.

### ***Direct Observation of Casework***

CWG will gather information about both the front-line practice environment and workforce challenges by shadowing family case managers and supervisors 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.

### ***Review of Case Files***

CWG will conduct a review of cases in a randomly selected small sample of in-home and out-of-home care cases, assessing investigation practices, assessment, case planning, and intervention strategies.

### ***Placement Resource Assessment***

Using DCS data and stakeholder interviews, CWG will assess the sufficiency of placement resources and identify barriers to developing and retaining quality placement resources.

### ***Review of Quality Assurance Reports and Processes***

CWG will review a sample of quality assurance reports as well as the process for providing feedback to field staff and for design and implementation of efforts to make strategic changes in practice directed toward improving specific outcomes.

### ***Report of Findings***

A final report and presentation of findings will be provided, inclusive of recommendations.

## **IV. Work Activities Completed or Underway**

- On January 3<sup>rd</sup> the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (CWG) began work in Indiana interviewing the interim director, senior staff, and incoming director Terry Stigdon.
- In the following weeks, the group has since talked to nearly every department in DCS central office. This includes personnel from the following departments:
  - Legal
  - Placement Support and Compliance
  - Policy
  - Staff Development
  - Innovation
  - Field Operations
  - Juvenile Justice Initiatives & Support
  - Information Technology
  - Finance
  - Human Resources
  - Child Welfare Services
- Additionally, CWG has conducted initial interviews in Marion County. Similar interviews will also take place in each of the other four identified regions over the next few months.
- In each of the five regions, CWG will observe front-line staff, supervisors, and other administrative staff as they go about their daily duties in the office, conduct in-home visits to families and children, attend court hearings, and perform all other routine functions.
- CWG is analyzing broad historical and longitudinal data sets provided by DCS.
- The group is also analyzing the volume and growth of the out-of-home care population in Indiana compared to surrounding states.
- CWG is reviewing all DCS internal policies and procedures/applicable statutes/aggregated macro-level data collected and measured by the agency.
- DCS has provided CWG with intake and assessment policies to review.
- DCS has also provided CWG with several previous reports that assessed various aspects of agency functions.
- CWG has begun to conduct interviews with child welfare advocacy and association groups, and contracted providers.
- CWG has begun to conduct interviews with House and Senate Leadership.

- For the remainder of this week, CWG is scheduled to meet with the Office of Court Services, relevant state agencies and a variety of stakeholders.

## **V. Noted Strengths and Challenges from work completed to date**

Based on information obtained thus far, reviewers have noted several strengths in the child welfare system in Indiana. These include:

- a core of highly skilled and knowledgeable administrative and management staff
- infrastructure to provide critical clinical and practice supports to front-line staff
- a stated model of practice that incorporates family-centered principles generally considered consistent with the current knowledge base in the child welfare field
- well organized and accessible on-line policy guidelines
- a large number of service provider organizations across the state, especially in Marion County.

At the same time, DCS notable challenges include:

- the need for an automated data system that more readily produces management reports which allow staff at all levels to continuously monitor their performance on key processes and outcomes
- a substantial number of children in out-of-home care
  - grew from 8,897 in December 2012 to 16,834 in December 2017 (per DCS data)

## **VI. Next Status Report**

The next CWG status report will be March 1, 2018.

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