

Ohio Citizen Review Panel

Annual Report

Executive Summary

May 15, 2022
Work Year 2021—2022



About this Report

Ohio Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are tasked with submitting an annual report to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) with recommendations for the improvement of the child protective services (CPS) system in Ohio. The CRPs conduct an annual review and evaluation of an identified issue or concern raised about the CPS system and make actionable and measurable recommendations to the state on how to improve this issue. The CRP program is prescribed by federal statute detailed in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). This report is the product of the Ohio CRPs' annual evaluation for the 2021 state fiscal year (SFY). The report details each panel's topic, process for review, and development of the recommendations submitted to ODJFS by May 15, 2022.



Report 1: Northwest Ohio CRP Report

The Northwest Ohio CRP focused their work on understanding racial disproportionality and disparities in Ohio's child welfare system. The panel gathered information from several sources including academic literature and state reports on racism. The panel laid the foundation for a bigger project in the coming work year. Ohio's report on racism in the child welfare system highlighted two important takeaways for the panel members, (1) youth feeling absent from choices in their placement process, and (2) the need to elevate black voices. As a result of the information gathered during this foundational work, the panel is developing a plan for data collection directly from youth and families of color about their experiences with Ohio's child welfare system. They want to know about those points in time when disproportionality is well documented. The panel hopes to provide authentic stories and solutions from the children and families in Ohio.

Next Steps:

The panel participated in the annual strategic planning with all Ohio CRPs on May 16, 2022. Panel members used this time to solidify their plan for 2022-2023 data collection procedures. The next steps for the Northwest Ohio CRP include:

- The panel will participate in strategic planning to define their topic, question, and data collection procedures.
- The panel will seek feedback from the OSU team, ODJFS, and other relevant stakeholders regarding their plan for primary data collection from youth and families.
- Following IRB approval, the panel will move forward with data collection procedures.
- With assistance from the OSU team, the panel will analyze the data and decide on the best way to present the results.
- The panel will make recommendations for improvement in the 2022-2023 work year.

Report 2: Northeast Ohio CRP Report

The Northeast Ohio CRP focused on evaluating the support for Ohio's child welfare workforce who are negatively affected by secondary traumatic stress (STS). The panel gathered information from several sources including academic literature, best practice guides, and PCSAO's workforce data and report. The panel also met with relevant stakeholders including ODJFS and PCSAO to better understand the scope of the topic and discuss potential strategies for change. As a result of the evaluation, the panel developed recommendations for improvement in Ohio's child welfare workforce well-being.



Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should launch a public awareness campaign about the important work of child welfare and the need for initiatives to address STS and promote the well-being of child welfare workers.

Evidence suggests that public awareness campaigns can influence child welfare workforce turnover. Less evidence is available to consider such an effort's effect on worker well-being or the experience of STS. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when the public is supportive of child welfare, workers may feel more supported following exposure to a traumatic event. From a citizen perspective, the panel feels strongly about the need to include this recommendation in the report. In addition to launching a public awareness campaign, they recommend creating a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of a public awareness campaign as part of this effort.

Recommendations (continued):

2. ODJFS should create or utilize an existing work committee dedicated to investigating the feasibility of new workforce models.

Throughout the panel's data collection, several ideas arose as potential solutions for addressing workforce turnover and STS experienced by the workforce. Interventions such as teaming cases, sabbaticals for training or education, and rotation to non-case carrying units may be strategies to mitigate STS and other negative workforce outcomes such as burnout and turnover. These interventions might include pilot testing and must be considered within the resources available by each individual county. Community partners such as PCSAO have expressed an interest in exploring new and innovative ways to carry out child welfare duties. This group could be a starting point to discuss the future of child welfare workforce models.

3. ODJFS should create and provide PCSAs with tools to measure workforce well-being.

The literature suggests when organizations ask their workforce how they are doing, it can positively influence how the worker feels about the agency. It is important for PCSAs to acknowledge STS among child welfare workers, measure workforce well-being, and employ strategies to address or mitigate the effects of STS on worker well-being. Having the tools to deploy these measures might be a barrier depending on PCSA resources. ODJFS may be able to assist by providing the measures and guidance on their importance to PCSAs.

4. ODJFS should develop or utilize existing critical incident debriefing protocols to be provided to all PCSAs.

A key step for child welfare organizations to become a trauma-responsive system to address the STS of their workforce, is to provide critical incident debriefing following a traumatic event at work. These events can include a child fatality, violence against a staff member, or acts of community violence. Some PCSAs may have critical incident debriefing protocols, but some may not recognize the need for this or have the tools to deliver these services for workers. ODJFS can consult the literature for models of critical incident debriefing such as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) or the Restoring Resiliency Response (RRR) Model (The Chadwick Trauma-Informed Systems Dissemination and Implementation Project, 2016).



Report 3: Central Ohio CRP Report

The Central Ohio CRP explored Ohio's child welfare response to children and families exposed to domestic violence (DV). Specifically, they set out to learn how PCSAs engage with families in ongoing cases who continue to experience DV. The panel gathered academic literature, Ohio Revised Code (ORC) information, and engaged with DV experts to better understand the scope of the problem. Additionally, the panel spent time learning about the best casework practices for DV involved child welfare cases from a variety of resources. The panel conducted case reviews specifically looking at a random sample of 50 case plans to learn how PCSAs treat and manage DV cases. The panel conducted the reviews specifically looking for the best practice principles for families experiencing DV. They also included a look at the availability of DV services for victims and batterers in each Ohio county for additional context. This report summarizes the panel's main findings from the case plan reviews and their recommendations for change.

Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should convene a workgroup or utilize an existing group to address potential SACWIS changes.

Throughout the panel's work, there were notable concerns about case plan documentation. The responsibility for documentation falls solely on caseworkers. The panel along with child welfare experts know the challenges that come with the demands of documentation. The panel recommends the following SACWIS changes to assist caseworkers with documentation quality and demand:

- a. Enhance documentation of the problem/incidents of DV.

Case plans severely lacked documentation of the incident which sparked a case opening. Providing a place specifically for the documentation of the problem can help alleviate this problem.

- b. Edit the case plan structure or provide additional training on best practices in case planning.

The case plans reviewed lacked consistency in documentation of the problem, services, and expected behavior change. Many case plans put all case participants in one concern box and listed all services for these participants together in the services section. This made reviewing the material difficult. Case participants should each receive their own section for concerns related to that person, the linked services, and the measurement of behavior change. This should include each child on the case plan.

- c. Add language to case plan to remind workers to document about the effects on the children and how services can address needs.

Many of the case plan lacked any information about the effect of DV on the children. Most county DV agencies provide children and youth services in some capacity. Case plans should address services for children which might include mental health services, educational programming, medical needs, among others.

2. ODJFS should conduct a community refresher training for the importance of CW and community collaboration to address DV among child welfare cases.

The original S&T implementation and roll-out included a community training component. It is important for all partnering agencies to be using the same language and working towards the same goal. The data gathered suggests that this piece is not consistently happening. There is no consensus about the available services and the best services for families involved with the child welfare system with co-occurring DV issues.

Recommendations (continued):

3. ODJFS should create and provide guidance or a resource document to PCSAs about the best practices for families experiencing DV and available services and resources in the community.

Several of the case plans included for review assigned case participants to get a “DV assessment” or take “DV classes” as required services. In consultation with ODVN and other DV experts in the community, there is confusion about what these services are and what child welfare professionals expect. ODJFS should investigate this further and provide guidance to PCSAs as well as local DV agencies about what DV-related services child welfare is seeking for victims and batterers and what is available in the community.

4. ODJFS should work with the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) partners to develop training specifically on case planning with families experiencing DV.

The original S&T implementation was focused on the intake level but was later offered to all caseworkers and supervisors. There has been no evaluation of S&T at the case planning and ongoing phase of child welfare services in Ohio. Caseworkers taking S&T, or another evidence based DV training would benefit from a training specific to best practices in case planning with child welfare involved families experiencing DV.



Report 4: Southwest Ohio CRP Report

The Southwest Ohio CRP concentrated on Ohio's ability to provide uninterrupted, stable, and high-quality education for children placed in residential facilities. The panel began by conducting a literature review detailing the problem and understanding the often-high educational needs of youth placed in out of home care. With limited information available about the educational services provided to youth in residential facilities, the panel planned a survey to gather information directly from these facilities. The survey focuses on how youth placed in these facilities go to school, the characteristics of school programs, and how youth transition into and out of residential education programs from their home education programs. The survey will be deployed in Summer 2022, and the panel will report on the findings with recommendations for improvement in the 2022-2023 Annual CRP Report.

Next Steps:

The panel participated in the annual strategic planning with all Ohio CRPs on May 16, 2022. Panel members used this time to solidify their plan for 2022-2023 data collection procedures. The next steps for the Southwest Ohio CRP are summarized here:

1. The referenced survey will be distributed to all Ohio CRCs in Summer 2022.
2. The panel will review the results of the survey at the first meeting of the next work year in August 2022.
3. Following this survey data analysis, the panel may solicit additional information to better understand the survey results. This may include reaching out to ODJFS, PCSAs, or local school districts/ODE for comment or more information.
4. The panel will submit recommendations for improvement on this topic in the 2022-2023 Annual CRP Report.

Report 5: Southeast Ohio CRP Report

The Southeast Ohio CRP conducted a project over the past year focused on how Ohio can improve their capacity for family foster homes for adolescents. While this topic provides several avenues for consideration, the panel focused on how language and the way caseworkers document youth needs can play a role in placement success. The panel gathered information from several sources including academic literature, a SACWIS demonstration to understand the placement process, and a document review of the Individual Child Care Agreement (ICCA) with Ohio Youth Advisory Board members. As a result of the evaluation, the panel developed recommendations for improvement. Additionally, the panel generated more questions throughout their work for the next year of work and will continue with this topic moving forward.



Recommendations:

1. Youth should be provided a copy of the ICCA at the time of placement as developmentally appropriate.

Youth have a right to see the information that is being written about them in the ICCA, but there might be times that seeing everything about their history could be triggering. The document should be provided with appropriate support services in place to help any youth that may have negative consequences from reading the information.

2. ODJFS should require updates to person profiles in SACWIS at semi-annual and annual reviews.

The person profiles in the ICCA are not required to be updated. Outdated and potentially harmful information being included in documentation, such as the ICCA, often serves as a key barrier to placement success for youths.

Recommendations (continued):

3. ODJFS should require PCSAs to prioritize a review of the ICCA at semiannual reviews and require an updated ICCA be completed within one month of the review.

ICCAs are often completed in emergency placement situations, but due to other casework demands it may not get updated. In the event of the need for another placement change, the ICCA should reflect the most current information about a young person. Like the person profiles, ICCAs are not part of semiannual and annual reviews. Adding the ICCA to these reviewing periods along with a requirement they are updated following the meeting, documentation can remain current and a true living document.

4. ODJFS should engage with partners such as Ohio YAB and Partner for Ohio's Families for changes to the ICCA that have been detailed and discussed in this report and address the overall need for the ICCA to better serve children and families as well as substitute caregivers.

This recommendation stems from the ICCA review and the numerous suggestions for change coming from panel members and foster alum with Ohio YAB. Many ideas for change were suggested but it might be more beneficial for ODJFS along with Ohio YAB, Partners for Ohio's Families (PFOF), and others to address potential changes together.

Moving Forward

All five Ohio CRPs met virtually via Zoom conference for their annual strategic planning session on Monday, May 16, 2022. During this meeting, members chose topics for the new work year and create a strategic plan to reach their goals for 2022–2023. They will brainstorm the types of data they will need for their evaluation. The data request will be submitted to ODJFS by September 30, 2022, to allow the state time to gather the information. The annual meeting also served as a wrap up of the 2021–2022 work year. The Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast Ohio CRPs will continue their evaluation topic from 2021-2022 as summarized in the annual report. The other two panels will have the opportunity to choose new topics for the 2022-2023 work year. The annual meeting provides the panels with the opportunity to discuss the successes and challenges from this year’s evaluation with panel members from other parts of the state.

