

Ohio Citizen Review Panel

Annual Report

Executive Summary

May 15, 2023
Work Year 2022—2023



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 2022 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, 2023.

Report 1: Northwest Ohio CRP Report



The Northwest Ohio CRP decided to focus their work on understanding how Ohio supports the well-being of youth involved with Ohio's child welfare system. The panel took some time to arrive at this topic following a conversation about a broader look and definition of child well-being. The Northwest CRP spent the 2022-2023 work year laying the groundwork for a bigger project in the coming year.

Next Steps:

The panel participated in the annual strategic planning with all Ohio CRPs on May 18, 2023. Panel members used this time to solidify their plan for 2023-2024 data collection procedures. The next steps for the Northwest Ohio CRP include:

1. The panel will participate in strategic planning to define their topic, question, and data collection procedures.
2. 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.
3. Following IRB approval, the panel will move forward with data collection procedures.
4. With assistance from the OSU team, the panel will analyze the data and decide on the best way to present the results.
5. The panel will make recommendations for improvement in the 2023-2024 work year.

Report 2: Northeast Ohio CRP Report

The Northeast Ohio CRP focused their evaluation on Ohio's support to families and monitoring of children after permanency is achieved. For the purposes of this report, the panel defined permanency as the closing of an ongoing case and reunification with biological family or kinship family. The panel was particularly interested in understanding which services families are referred to or linked at the time of reunification and case closure to encourage family stabilization. Additionally, they were curious about the extent to which these services prevent reentry into the child welfare system following a successful reunification. The panel gathered information from several sources including academic literature, stakeholder interviews, and Ohio SACWIS data. As a result of the evaluation, the panel developed recommendations for improvement in Ohio's support of families once permanency is achieved.



Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should conduct an analysis of the functionality of the case services tab in SACWIS to enhance the usability of case services data.

The case services data from SACWIS is an incomplete source of evaluative information. It seems this data could be useful for many different child welfare evaluations including for this panel in the case of understanding families who reenter the child welfare system in Ohio. The panel recommends ODJFS convene a workgroup or an evaluation project on how the case services might be more functional and useful for caseworkers as well as those with evaluation duties.

Recommendations (continued):

2. ODJFS should encourage the use of evidence-based programs that bring foster families together with biological families during the process of reunification and directly following reunification.

Research suggests building relationships between foster families and biological families can strengthen reunification efforts. While some PCSAs are engaged in programming that bridges these relationships, ODJFS should place an effort on educating and encouraging these kinds of practices for all PCSA across the state. ODJFS should also help with implementation as needed or requested.

3. ODJFS should conduct an analysis on what programs already exist in Ohio to support family stabilization following reunification. ODJFS should then use this information to develop best practices and share resources across PCSAs.

Anecdotally, the panel is aware of several local efforts to bring together community partners to support families once reunification is achieved. It is important to document these efforts and understand the logistics of this kind of supportive service. ODJFS should be involved in finding and sharing this information and providing guidance as needed.



Report 3: Central Ohio CRP Report

The Central Ohio CRP focused their evaluation on meeting the needs of youth who are affected by multiple systems through Ohio's Multi-System Youth (MSY) program. Multi-system youth are defined as receiving services from multiple youth serving systems including child protection, mental health and addiction services, developmental disabilities services, and/or juvenile court. To meet high acuity, often high-cost behavioral health needs for these youth through services like residential treatment, families often utilize child welfare services to pay for these services through Title IV-E federal funding. Some families feel they must give up custody of their child to a PCSA to access this treatment through Title IV-E funding or juvenile courts. In 2019, Ohio's Governor Mike DeWine provided \$68 million in new funding to address the needs of Ohio's multi-system youth with the creation of the MSY program. The panel was particularly interested in the eligibility criteria for MSY funding, the referral sources, the most often requested services, and the outcomes of the program. The Central Ohio CRP was most interested in understanding the ways in which the MSY program is benefiting children and families involved with Ohio's child welfare system, particularly whether the MSY program contributed to the prevention of youth's placement with PCSA. The Central Ohio CRP utilized several methods of data collection to learn about and better understand this topic. The panel reviewed all publicly available data and reports regarding the MSY program, interviewed several PCSAs about their experiences with the program, and met with the Ohio Family and Children First Councils (FCFC) Director and others in the state level FCFC office, including the Ohio FCFC Association. As a result of the evaluation, the panel developed recommendations to consider as the program moves forward.

Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should provide Ohio FCFC the resources to analyze current MSY data from referral forms.

Currently MSY applications are being submitted on hard copy forms and collected by Ohio FCFC. Resources at Ohio FCFC limit their ability to conduct an evaluation of this information. ODJFS should provide Ohio FCFC with resources, such as training to enhance data visualization tools in Excel or staff to conduct data entry, to aid in the evaluation of this data.

2. ODJFS in collaboration with Ohio FCFC and OhioRISE to create and implement an online database format for MSY applications.

As MSY funding continues to be requested, Ohio FCFC and ODJFS should consider creating an online referral form for applicants. This will ease the evaluation process.

3. During evaluation of the MSY funding program, ODJFS should include an evaluation of families who are not funded.

It is equally important to understand which families are declined from accessing MSY funding and the reasons for the rejection. This kind of analysis allows state level professionals to continue assessing service needs in the community and tailor programs to best meet family's needs.

4. During evaluation of the MSY funding program, ODJFS should include a specific analysis on populations of children and families served by this program to identify disproportionality and create initiatives to address any inequities.

Ohio's Children Services Transformation Report highlights the importance of addressing racial inequalities in child welfare services along with all services for children and families in Ohio. Following this priority, evaluation of MSY should include a look at racial disparities in funded applications, services offered, and outcomes of the services provided.

5. As MSY funding continues to change and adapt to new initiatives and family needs, ODJFS must ensure all stakeholders work together to ensure practice is based on best processes and clearly defined roles so gaps are clearly resolved.

The implementation of OhioRISE drastically changed the MSY program during the panel's work year. Plenty of confusion surrounds this transition, and interviews with PCSAs and FCFCs suggest the roles and expectations of all partners are unclear. As the state continues in the impletion of OhioRISE and MSY changes to adapt to needs unmet by families not eligible for OhioRISE, ODJFS must ensure families and other stakeholders have representation in the decisions amid these changes.

Report 4: Southwest Ohio CRP Report

For the past two years, the Southwest Ohio CRP has focused on Ohio's ability to provide uninterrupted, stable, and high-quality education for children placed in residential care facilities. This topic was inspired by panel members' work with children in their communities. The panel chose this topic as they identified the lack of adequate education services for children in out-of-home care as an important concern. The panel began by conducting a literature review detailing the problem and understanding the educational needs of youth placed in out-of-home care. While this information was helpful in learning more about the needs of these youth, there was little to no information about the details of the educational services provided to youth in residential care facilities. Panel members decided to collect their own information to carry out the goals as outlined in their strategic plan. This report details the results of a survey distributed to all Ohio CRCs with the following objectives:

- a. Understand how youth placed in a CRC in Ohio attend school (with a local school district, a charter program, an online program, etc.),
- b. Catalog the characteristics of school programs in Ohio CRCs, and
- c. Learn how youth transition between CRC education programs from their home education programs.



Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should create a guidance document to prepare youth and educational professionals for a transition from one placement to another.

Due to the high educational needs of youth in custody of PCSAs, it is imperative special attention be given to how these transitions occur. ODJFS should develop a guide or checklist type guidance to PCSAs to ensure youth's educational needs are met during these transition periods.

2. ODJFS should engage with ODE partners at the state level to engage in advocacy for additional funding and resources to be directed toward meeting the needs of youth in CRCs or those who have moved from their home district.

The survey results overwhelmingly suggest the need for additional resources and attention paid to the unique needs of educating youth placed in CRCs. About 71% of youth placed in reporting CRCs in Ohio were in the custody of a PCSA. ODJFS holds responsibility for meeting the education needs of youth in out-of-home care, and it seems the partnership between ODJFS and ODE is essential to meet these educational needs.

3. ODJFS should direct funding to CRCs to provide tutoring services for those youth in PCSA custody to meet their educational needs.

CRC staff overwhelming reported a lack of resources to meet the needs of youth in PCSA custody placed in their facility. PCSAs often provide funding for tutoring services for children in out-of-home care, and the panel recommends ODJFS to work with PCSAs to set aside money specific to tutoring service for those in CRCs. ODJFS should provide guidance to PCSAs to overcome any potential barriers to providing these services.

4. ODJFS should provide opportunities for trauma-informed training for educators in CRCs who serve youth in custody of a PCSA.

Survey results suggest CRCs need educators who are informed and prepared to work with youth who have experienced trauma and been involved with the child welfare system. ODJFS has access to these trainers and training curriculum, and the panel recommends they open access to these trainings to those providing educational services in CRCs in Ohio.

Report 5: Southeast Ohio CRP Report

The Southeast Ohio CRP conducted a project in the 2022-2023 work year focused on the ways in which Ohio can improve its capacity for providing family foster homes for adolescents. While this topic provides several avenues for consideration, the panel focused on how language and the way agencies document and communicate about youth needs may play a role in placement success. In the prior year, panel members embarked on a similar project focused on learning about the placement process and hearing about the issues as reported by youth who have experienced the child welfare system. Building on this previous project, the panel moved to learning about the placement process and the barriers to successful placement from the perspective of Ohio PCSAs and private placement networks.



Recommendations:

1. ODJFS should create and implement a consistent referral form for placement requests to be used statewide.

Currently all PCSAs utilize their own methods for requesting placement of a child from network providers including different forms, inclusion of the ICCA, and different LOC tools. In consultation with PCSAs, youth, and private networks, ODJFS should create a referral form that meets the needs of all parties to maximize the chances of successful family foster home placements.

2. ODJFS should create and implement a consistent, evidence-based, level of care tool to be used at the time a placement is needed.

Like the previous recommendation, all PCSAs utilize their own LOC tool. As the state moves towards a tiered foster care system, it is imperative that the standards for determining level of care are consistent across the state.

Recommendations (continued):

1. ODJFS should advocate for consistent application of the prudent parenting standards (Ohio Revised Code Section 5103.162) across all PCSAs.

Inconsistent interruption and practice of the prudent parenting standard causes confusion and conflict between placing PCSAs and private placing networks. Private networks often work with several PCSAs in differing regions across Ohio. Interview results suggest differences in county level practice regarding the prudent parenting standards has caused conflict between caseworkers and seasoned foster parents as well as confusion between placing networks and PCSAs. This recommendation is specific to one practice identified by networks as being problematic in the placement process, but there may be other practices across PCSAs that are inconsistent and causing confusion among partners.

Moving Forward

All five Ohio CRPs met virtually via Zoom conference for their annual strategic planning session on Thursday, May 18, 2023. During this meeting, members chose topics for the new work year and created a strategic plan to reach their goals for 2023–2024. They will brainstorm the types of data they will need for their evaluation. The data request will be submitted to ODJFS by September 30, 2023, to allow the state time to gather the information. The annual meeting also serves as a wrap up of the 2022–2023 work year. The Northwest Ohio CRP will continue their evaluation topic from 2022-2023 as summarized in this annual report. The other four panels will have the opportunity to choose new topics for the 2023-2024 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.

