

**Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
2013-2014**

Name of Panel:	Outagamie County CRP
Contact Person & Title:	Melissa Blom, Manager, Outagamie County Dept. of Health and Human Services Division of Children, Youth and Families

Briefly describe the panel’s meeting schedule and number/types of meetings, including subcommittee and workgroup meetings, held in 2013.

The panel meets bi-monthly, generally the first Wednesday of each month, for one and one half hours. Six meetings were held in 2013.

There are 5 workgroups. They are:

- System change (did not meet)
- Review of Child Fatalities and Egregious Incidents (met by phone)
- Website Task Force (Did not meet)
- Member Recruitment and Training (met 3 times)
- Social Worker Support (met 7 times)

Outagamie County also has an active child death review team that is funded with Citizen Review panel dollars. This team meets every first Tuesday of the month.

Please provide a summary of the panel’s activities in regards to:

Evaluating the extent to which the State and the local child protection agencies are fulfilling their child protection responsibilities.

Our CRP reviewed one CPS case looking for any gaps in the service system. Melissa Blom, the Manager of Outagamie County’s Division of Children, Youth and Families, is a member of our panel and reported on issues pertinent to child protection at our January 2013 meeting. They are:

- Efforts to improve family teaming, which are underway as a result of the 2012 Quality Service Review,
- Continuing work with the crossover youth project
- Structuring work duties for a new supervisor
- Improving organizational effectiveness of the department
- Need for social worker support.

In response to her comments, the panel decided to focus on social worker support. A workgroup was created to schedule focus groups with the workers to find out what needs they have and look at ways in which we could assist.

Evaluating local and State progress under the State CAPTA Plan.

The three main areas addressed in the state CAPTA plan are integrating safety intervention throughout the CPS case process, preventing maltreatment of children and the recurrence of maltreatment, and promoting cross system collaboration in order to enhance services to children and families. The CRP considers these areas when reviewing CPS cases and child fatalities. We also

receive regular reports on the progress of the pilot program between Children Youth and Families and Youth and Families Divisions on Dual Status Youth. There are both a judge and a representative from the District Attorney's office on our panel so we frequently discuss any issues around the court system. Our effort to improve the guardian ad litem program is a collaboration with the court. We recently reviewed the work we have done on the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) brochure and realized that we need to monitor the process and ensure that the brochure is up to date and in the hands of parents, and that GALs are seeing the children they are representing and turning in required reports. Panel members routinely bring up issues at the state and national level that affect children and families and recommendations are made to contact legislators.

Activities related to public outreach and comment to assess the impact of current child protection procedures and practices on children and families in the community.

The CRP has developed and posted a website which contains an overview of the CRP, members, minutes and agendas, and a resource page. Plans are in place to add updates, our mission and vision, links to national and local CASA and National CRP, and ways in which citizens of the county can become involved.

The panel worked on a plan to hold another town hall meeting in October of 2014. Discussions were held around topics and intended audience. Possibilities include mandated reporter training, a resource fair, foster care recruitment, presenting statistics on egregious incidents and deaths and showing the shaken baby simulator, cultural differences related to discipline, and explanation of the child abuse reporting process.

Did the panel conduct any reviews of CPS cases, child fatalities and near fatalities? If yes, please describe.

The panel reviewed one case regarding a child left at a hospital shortly after birth. The discussion involved Safe Haven laws. There is some difficulty with the process when a parent utilizes this law as hospital staff are not fully trained in how the law works. The panel is aware that Children Youth and Families has developed a workgroup at the local level to develop protocol with the hospitals. Also, we do not believe that enough community members know about or understand the law.

The Outagamie County Child Death Review Team has been operating since 2007 and is funded with CRP dollars. Last year the team reviewed 29 deaths. It is important to note that the reviews encompassed children that died as far back as 2008, as cases are not reviewed unless closed by the Coroner and the District Attorney's Office. This team works on prevention efforts such as safe sleep, prevention of abusive head trauma or "shaken baby", and suicide. The team was coordinated by the Division Manager for Children, Youth and Families but as of 2013 the duties for coordination has been transferred to the Division of Public Health. For examples of the team's efforts in prevention please see the Outagamie County Public Health page at: <http://www.outagamie.org/index.aspx?page=1287>.

Members of the Outagamie County CRP were part of a statewide workgroup that analyzed child fatalities and egregious incidents.

Please describe any other panel activities or issues addressed in 2013.

The CRP receives regular updates on the Dual Status youth project (children in the child protection and juvenile justice systems), of which Outagamie County is a part. The goal is to have a practice manual in place by August of 2014, and in the future become a resource bank for other sites as they implement the project. For more information and to see the Outagamie County manual, please visit this link: <http://www.rfknrcjj.org/our-work/dual-status-youth-reform>.

We also receive regular updates on the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) project. The Outagamie CASA program is up and running, having hired an Executive Director and started the process of training advocates. This program grew out of a presentation to the Outagamie CRP by the Brown County CASA Executive Director.

Retention and training of social work staff was explored through a focus group with the Children Youth and Families staff. They expressed concern over increasing caseloads, more complex families and documentation that is unrealistic to manage. This may be causing them to leave their jobs. Several workers left the county in 2013 and their cases had to be reassigned to existing workers, causing even more stress. Also, the new 170 pages of ongoing standards have resulted in increased paperwork, and the training for the standards was not rolled out until after the standards were in effect. Several suggestions were made about what the CRP role could be in this issue. It was suggested the role for the CRP might be around advocacy for change in how policies are rolled out and implemented throughout the state. Two workgroups were created: One, to survey the workers to find out if they are experiencing undue stress and if so, what can be done to help them out, and two, a workgroup to look at possible recommendations to the State regarding system changes.

The Social Worker Support Workgroup reported that the hiring of eight new social workers in a short period of time, hiring workers with little experience, more difficult families in the system, and increased paperwork are all factors causing stress. Workers were surveyed to determine if they felt they were under undue stress and if so, what the causes might be. Some results of the survey:

Technology: changes in the voicemail system have made it more complicated and time consuming. Also, workers were given tablets to use for documentation, but they were offered either a tablet or a laptop, not both.

Workload: Paperwork takes up 80% of worker time. Also, late night and weekend work is required due to high caseloads. There are 250-300 calls a month to CPS, and each call must now result in a referral.

External Relationships: There are more meetings which workers and supervisors are required to attend, resulting in less time to spend with families. Workers

would like to work more closely with the GALs and the District Attorneys to help with work flow.

Retention: More time for training of new workers is imperative.

The workgroup presented some possible next steps in which the CRP can be involved:

- Hold focus groups more often with yearly goal setting
- Work with MIS on the phone system and tablet issue
- Continue GAL work
- Present the Parent resource Program to the CRP as this is one way people come into the system voluntarily
- Explore Lean Management- Maximizing customer value while minimizing waste to streamline the work
- Look at ways to enhance relationships with other systems, ie. the court
- Investigate the possibility of having new workers shadow seasoned
- Explore what other counties are doing re: on-call time

A workgroup was created to identify the systemic issues involved in worker stress and will create a summary of recommendations to address these issues.

The CRP organized and funded a social worker appreciation lunch.

The County now uses Emergency Resource Homes and foster homes. Emergency Resource Homes are often full and there is a shortage of open foster homes. The foster home shortage issue is being addressed in CYF and progress has been made, but this may be an area of focus for the CRP.

Three people from our CRP attended the National Conference in Wyoming. Some of the takeaways:

- Some states allow kids to stay in foster care until 21 and some states have a foster child's bill of rights: Wisconsin has neither. Should we investigate either/both of those further?
- It is important to have a representative from the school system as part of our panel. The person who coordinates the program for homeless kids and families for the school district has since joined the panel.
- We are very fortunate to have a great relationship with the Human Services System folks and the judges in our county. That is NOT true everywhere!
- People who experience horrendous abuse can be healed and reconnecting with family (siblings) can really help in that healing process.
- There are many issues with youth in, and aging out, of foster care. We would like to recruit a former foster youth for our panel.

And, in the words of Pastor Larry Creamer:
“There are times when the challenges of administering child protective services are as imposing as the majestic Teton Mountains which provided the backdrop for our conference. Working together we can find a way over the mountain.”

Please describe activities planned or held to date in 2014.

THE CRP will continue to address the wellbeing of our social workers, especially in two areas: One is in the area of possible systemic changes that could be recommended, especially around the ongoing standards, and two, the scheduling of court hearings that is resulting in too much downtime for workers. We will look at the possibility of different ways of scheduling or the possibility of finding areas that the workers can catch up on their paperwork in the courthouse and still maintain confidentiality.

We will also continue to revise our guardian ad litem brochure and work with other state panels on the larger issues around GALs.

Nine members of the CRP attended the statewide meeting in January of 2014.

We will be holding a town hall meeting in the fall of 2014.

Other possibilities for 2014 were;

Kids aging out of foster care and the problems that are generated for them.

Looking at a “birth match program,” which checks new births with parents that had rights terminated.

Education on safe haven laws.

Panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the local level:

We need to work with the courts to improve the GAL system.

We need to work with DHS to reduce the stress on our social workers.

We need to find ways to assist children aging out of foster care.

Panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the State level:

The rollout of the ongoing standards was not handled well and some of the standards are very difficult to meet. Panel recommends that the state be in communication with the counties so paperwork is not overwhelming.

Please submit the completed CRP Annual Report and the panel’s current membership list to the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families by e-mailing copies to Paula Brown at PaulaL.Brown@wisconsin.gov. The annual report and the DCF response to each report will be posted on the DCF Citizen Review Panel web page at http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/citizen_review/default.htm. Thank you.