A Regular Publication from the Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare



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The Excellence in

Practice awards

recognize county

staff who

demonstrate in their

daily work a

commitment to

safety, permanency

and well-being.

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Safety



**Permanency** 



Well-being



### Colorado's CFSR Rescheduled

The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau jointly with the Colorado Department of Human Services have decided to reschedule the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to March 2009.

This decision was made after discussion surrounding resolution of Colorado's current Program Improvement Plan (PIP), the loss of key staff at the Federal level, and the high

number of reviews scheduled this year for the ACF, Region 8. The new date provides several opportunities for Colorado. It is NOT a time to slow down our efforts and commitments to creating an effective system for our children and their families. It provides more time to dedicate and reaffirm our commitments to the safety, permanency and well-being of Colorado's children.



#### Florida - Locked in a Room

By Jim Drendel, Ph.D.

Larimer County Children, Youth and Family

As I was flying to Florida, my thoughts were centered around what the heck was I doing. The food poisoning the night before did not help and I was nervous. It was a beautiful day as I stepped off the plane, mid 70's and the sun was shining. I entertained the thought of relaxing the next day when I finished with my chores of the audit.

Bang! Wake up you idiot! There was no relaxation the next day, only nighttime when you get done with the audit meetings. I was locked in a room for 4 days on end with people who seemed to like doing audits. I am not talking just the 8 to 5 variety of days either. Judy Rodriguez never told me that the day was going to be 7AM to 10PM, but that is what it was. It was awesome weather outside: at least that is what I heard. (By the way the room was full of sugar treats or bribes from the county being audited).

Along with being trapped inside all day, there were some tense times also. I remember Tuesday night an audit review team seemingly packing up for the night and I was a little panic-stricken because we were not done with our first case yet. But then the fed stood up, all 5'2" of her, and told them to sit down and get back to work. I thought they were going to cry! As a matter of fact I wanted to cry too and called my mom on my cell phone. All kidding aside, it was a really valuable

experience for me as a Child Welfare Director to participate in this audit. In the end, I totally understood the pressure to keep working into the night as it takes a long time for the interviews, computer entry, review of your review by the feds, and fixing all those "stickies" as they call them. Getting stickies are really bad for a review team! The team next to us had been involved in other audits and after they sent in their 1st case to the reviewers they still got 17 stickies in their case. I laughed inside at them because they were going so fast, thinking of course how well my team was doing. A day and a half later our team submitted our 1st case and it was returned with 48 stickies! What a blow to the team. Deflated but not broken, I decided my teammate needed to listen to me more, because I do not like to give long answers and the feds seemed to be looking for short answers. We sent our case back and were rewarded with just ten stickies to fix. Using my vast knowledge base the next case went much faster and we only had 17 stickies to fix. What I learned is the feds really were the piece that kept everything on the up and up. They did not seem to have a mean spirited attitude nor did they want reviewers to be unfair either way. The feds send stickies back to (Continued on Page 2)

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CFSR Kickoff **CFSR Meeting** July - October, May 23, 2007 June 8, 2007

Regional Kickoffs **CW Conference** May 27-30, 2008 2007

Assessment

Statewide

TBD

Receive State **Data Profile** TBD

State Reviewer Training

**Child and Family** Services Review March 2009

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(Continued from Page 1) ensure the reviewers were answering the questions the same way. As I flew back from Florida I started reflecting on what I had learned and how I could use this knowledge to make Larimer County a better place for children and families.

Four things came to my very tired brain. One was that Larimer has no real approach to domestic violence to help workers; second, that risk assessments that are check sheets may be easy but are of poor quality; third, that family connections need to be explored in a systematic way with real effort, and cookie cutter plans for families are everywhere and not effective at dealing with what the family says they need. I was wrong to assume that a worker who averages the age of 25ish can really have an idea of how to help in a domestic violence situation. Over and over the Florida review had domestic violence cases, just like Larimer, and the plans still reflected the traditional cookie cutter approach and not what the people we serve describe as needing. Children asking for mediation with parents who we choose not to contact out of fear and then demanding they follow a plan that makes

In a case I reviewed the family asked for mediation for the older children with the father and instead got a restraining order and a demand that the straight A students go to school. Similarly, mom requested help with housing only to be told the child welfare did not provide this service? Not once in this domestic violence case did the worker contact the father nor listen to the mother. My trip to Florida confirmed for me that we need to get back to defining good child welfare work as a team, including the State, County and families.

I guess I would use a baseball analogy of keeping our eye on the ball. As I grew up in a baseball world my coach always told me that I was not trying to just hit the ball, but that I was trying to hit the exact center of the ball! For me, the question is, are we trying to serve the children and families' needs or the needs of our own system? Continuing the analogy, the center of the ball is the families' needs, as they best understand them. The outer edges are a combination of their needs to raise their children and our needs to help them keep their children safe. If we just hit the ball by providing the services we deem appropriate, without the input from the family, is that good enough? Or, is it best practice to allow the family to define their needs and assist them in meeting those needs and in this way ensure the safety of the children?

Our system has so many things a caseworker has to check and worry about, I wonder if we could develop a simpler method that accomplishes the same goal? I know we need ARD and all the checks and balances. We must hit the center of the ball as well as achieve compliance. The real outcomes are related to getting the child to a safe home, protecting a child from re-abuse, finding family who really want the child and other similar outcomes. Can these be accomplished with checks and balances alone or is the families' input and buy-in also needed?

Larimer has never been dinged or rarely dinged for our minimal family searches in the past. However, the central issue for a child in Larimer or a child in Florida is the same, "connections". In Larimer, we are now finding family that we said did not exist and I hope other counties take a good look at this issue. Children deserve permanency, but they also need connections! After many months of frustration, I believe that most caseworkers are not skilled in and are uncomfortable contacting relatives they do not know. Therefore, the caseworker relies on the sometimes limited amount of information obtained from the immediate family and assumes that there are no other family connections for children. This is a disservice to the rest of the family and particularly to the child.

We are good at talking about training, but even with the best training, are our expectations realistic? Have we created a system where the task of completing checklists, audits and reviews is an overwhelming and unachievable task that will ultimately lead to caseworkers quitting their jobs or staying in an unfulfilling job? This seems to be a disservice to not only the caseworkers but also the families in our care. I was a full time college professor for over five years and I know that I talked many students into working in child welfare. The problem is not one of having limited potential caseworkers that want to help children and families, but one of keeping those caseworkers. When we expect a caseworker to do miracles with too little time and too limited resources, than we can expect them to soon become disenchanted. What begins as a journey to help children and families ends in disillusionment in a system that seems to care more about "rules" then about children. Discouragement is written all over their faces. All in all I do not know where we are going in the next few years. I am sure there will be more rules on top of rules. We always try to legislate our way into and out of social issues. However, we need to keep our eye on hitting the middle of the ball. Caseworkers need to have the time to do their work if we expect good outcomes. The rules need to assist them in hitting the center of the ball rather than cluttering up the view of the ball. As I have believed for over thirty years, "it's about the children".

Thanks to my editors Deb Deluca, Ginny Riley, and Denise Suniga

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# The CFSR Purpose and Process

By Sam Martinez, Administration for Children and Families

I have been asked to provide my observations of Colorado's progress on the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process. It is my opinion that the success of Colorado in the CFSR mirrors the success of the Children's Bureau Regional Office. The Regional Office is working hard to accomplish the critical goals we have set for ourselves. Karen Beye and her staff are committed to a positive result. Our meetings with Jim Snyder and Judy Rodriguez continue to be productive and beneficial. Hopefully, Jim's leaving and the transfer of our CFSR coordinator will not cause significant disruption.

The Court Improvement Project (CIP) continues unabated. I am impressed with the work of Bill Delisio. CIP Coordinator and the Honorable Karen Ashby, as CIP Co-Chair and Presiding Judge in Denver Juvenile Court. The judges, attorneys and other committee members demonstrate a real commitment to solving problems and are effective in meshing the two different branches of state government. In addition, the work by Sheri Danz, the Representation Coordinator at the State Court Administrator's Office must be commended. The Statewide Needs Assessment and the Final Report to the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, issued last year, were exemplary.

Gayle Stack and the Administrative Review Division (ARD) are doing a great job trying to make sense of the rules and regulations issued by the Children's Bureau. I have a

deep respect for their work. The tracking of families and children that enter our system, identifying the services that are provided them, and then reporting that information accurately, can be a bit daunting. The standing agenda items of the committee of County Specific Forms, Resources and Innovations, makes the work of the committee challenging.

Involving stakeholders in the CFSR process is critical. Providing the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) information on the status of the ongoing process enables them to ask questions, propose ideas and make recommendations to the CFSR staff.

We still have a long way to go and we have a lot of work to do. The additional time we have due to the postponement of the scheduled review by the Children's Bureau to March 2009 will give us the opportunity to further meet our goals. We will need that time and we shouldn't feel that we have a breather. We need to keep up the intensity, I think, to be successful. The CFSR is in and of itself just a point-in-time snapshot of the services the state provides and the quality of those services. I am pleased that the State of Colorado does not believe that the CFSR is the end of a long arduous process but, rather, the continuation of providing the best possible services to the families of Colorado.

### **Denver County Mock Review**

Denver County Department of Human Services hosted a mock Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) December 17 - 19, 2007. The review was a collaboration between the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and Denver County DHS. The CDHS staff worked closely with Denver County's Performance, Improvement, and Accountability Division (PIAD) to coordinate the Review. The mock review was a great experience for state and county staff. It was particularly helpful for staff that hadn't previously been involved in a CFSR, in terms of applying the Onsite Review Instrument to an actual case.

Thirteen teams of county/state partners reviewed 26 cases, 2/3 had children in out-of-home placement, and 1/3 were in-home cases. Each team had two cases to review and apply the instrument to. The process involved reviewing the files and interviewing people pertinent to the case such as the child, parents, Guardians ad Litem, providers, etc. There was a debriefing each evening to go through each case and how each did on the outcomes. Denver County's PIAD staff coordinated all of the interviews ahead of time and they were very well synchronized.

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The review also included interviews of groups of stakeholders including: Administrative Review Division Staff; child protection and youth intake caseworkers; child protection intake, youth intake and ongoing supervisors; community partners including tribal representatives; court officers; DDHS city attorneys, DDHS director and the child welfare director; Denver Police Department (DPD) child abuse detectives; the Family Crisis Center pediatrician; foster and adoptive parents; Guardians Ad Litem and respondent attorneys, Kempe Center staff, resource supervisors; and youth.

Overall, the Denver County Mock Review went very well. There was an excellent collaboration and cooperation between agencies. Everyone involved in the review put in long days and even longer evenings. Our thanks to Denver County for being a gracious host and committing extensive staff and resources to the successful Mock Review. When the other two other counties are chosen for the Review, they will also be invited to participate in a Mock Review later this year. Overall, this is a great opportunity for counties to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement prior to the actual Child and Family Services Review.

view.

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## Using CFSR Data to Improve Best Practice

The Division of Child Welfare (DCW) and the Administrative Review Division (ARD) are teaming up to present an interactive workshop at this year's Summit on Children, Youth and Families. Greg Smith, B.A., the Data Specialist from DCW and Marc Mackert, Ph.D., with ARD will be hosting a dynamic seminar on using data to improve outcomes and ultimately provide better services to children, youth and families. The colloquium will focus on how the State and the counties can use ARD and CFSR data, not just to show compliance, but also to increase awareness and improve performance statewide.

This workshop will provide assistance to child welfare staff and judicial workers through the use of research and data related to the CFSR. In addition, focus will be on the measures or components that Colorado is lacking compliance on and how we, as a state, can start to improve our performance system-wide across agencies and departments prior to the actual review. This will be an open forum for the county and State stakeholders to exchange ideas, experiences, and challenges that the CFSR presents. Participants will be encouraged to think outside the box and come up with creative ideas to improve performance and to communicate this information effectively with agency staff, peers, families and other stakeholders.

### Colorado Summit on Children, Youth and Families

By Kay Yorty, State Court Administrators Office

The Division of Child Welfare and the Colorado Judicial Branch are making history by working together to replace their respective annual conferences with the first annual *Colorado Summit on Children, Youth, and Families* to be held in Keystone Colorado from May 27 - May 30, 2008. Judicial and Child Welfare have been meeting in joint planning sessions since August 2007 to choose a location, to find plenary speakers, to design cross-training sessions, and to iron out all of the many other details that go into planning a summit.

The first day of the *Summit* is structured very much like the traditional annual conferences because it is divided into two completely separate trainings for judicial and child welfare participants. This will give judges and child welfare administrators time to take care of yearly business matters and to provide them with educational updates in their respective fields. Judicial will offer two training tracks, one for judges and one for attorneys. Child Welfare will offer one training track, the *Director's Forum*.

On the second day, the team track for *Best Practice Court Collaboratives* begins. These collaboratives are led by a judge who is appointed by the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court and are multi-disciplinary in nature. Membership always includes local child welfare participants and may include children's attorneys, respondent parent council attorneys, education representatives, service providers, foster parents, faith based organizations, or any other participant who is involved in the child welfare system

or the world of dependency and neglect. The team track is dedicated to setting and refining goals. Even though the specific goals vary among teams, the overarching goal of all the teams is to achieve permanency for foster care children and youth. The teams will continue to meet throughout the *Summit* and will come together for a debriefing breakfast on the last day of the *Summit*.

Beginning in the afternoon on the second day and continuing on throughout the rest of the *Summit*, cross disciplinary training sessions are being offered to all judicial and child welfare attendees in the areas of: *Child and Family*; *Programs*, *Projects and Agencies*; *Law*, *Courts and Advocacy*; *Professional Growth & Development*; and *Child Welfare*.

Of course, as with all great *Summits*, the participants will have plenty of opportunity to share best practices in a Gallery Walk and recognize professional accomplishments through *Excellence in Practice* awards.

The Division of Child Welfare and the Colorado Judicial Branch are excited to have this opportunity to work together and feel that the collaboration will do more to achieve permanency, safety, and well-being for children, youth and families who find themselves in the child welfare system than would the individual efforts represented by separate conferences.

To find out more about the *Summit*, *visit* <a href="http://www.cosummit.com/">http://www.cosummit.com/</a>