# The State of Idaho "Keeping Children Safe" Citizen Review Panels Statewide Annual Report 2007

# Idaho's "Keeping Children Safe Panels"

Recognizing the importance of public participation and community engagement, beginning in 1995, the Department of Health and Welfare organized citizen review panels in each of its seven regions to examine how Idaho's Child Protection System works and to make recommendations for improving the system. The panels have focused on providing an independent analysis of how the child protection system responds to abuse and neglect and the overall community supports for children and families in crisis.

In 1996, Congress amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). In its amendments to CAPTA, Congress required that states must establish Citizen Review Panels by July of 1999 in order to receive funding for the Child Abuse and Neglect State Grants Program. While this was the impetus for many states and their Citizen Review Panels, Idaho developed its Citizen Review Panels several years prior to the requirement.

Idaho's Citizen Review Panels have elected to call themselves Keeping Children Safe Panels. Throughout Idaho, most of the panels meet monthly, review cases of child abuse and neglect, attend child fatality reviews, go to court, and observe the implementation of Department policies and procedures as they interact with families and other agencies. Once a year the panels submit a report of their collective experiences, findings and recommendations to the Director of the Department of Health and Welfare.

There are approximately sixty (60) Keeping Children Safe Panel members in Idaho. Once a year, they meet together to review their activities, share ideas, and receive additional training. Each panel member serves up to eight hours a month. These citizen volunteers have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to Idaho's children and a willingness to involve themselves in the work of making our communities safer for children.

On October 20, 2007, during their annual statewide meeting, the Keeping Children Safe Panel members discussed their regional issues and concerns. Their findings are summarized in the following Keeping Children Safe Statewide Panel Recommendations 2007 Report.

These recommendations are listed by category and are not delineated by priority.

#### I. Prevention

#### A. Child Abuse and Awareness

In many communities there is a negative stigma regarding the Department of Health and Welfare. We propose to work within our communities to help promote a more positive image of the Department. We feel that there would be more people readily available to approach the subject of child abuse and neglect. We would like to see funding available to help get more information to our communities about child abuse and neglect.

#### Recommendation:

The Department needs to have more funding to bring awareness to the communities for child abuse and neglect.

## B. Community Resources for Families Program (CRFF)

As a Citizen Review Panel for Idaho, we are committed to the reinstatement of the Community Resources for Families Program (CRFF) in local schools as an effective preventative program for Idaho families. We believe this is an essential way to provide early intervention services to families in the community setting, to help them help themselves. These services have been proven to be very effective in increasing child well-being, school readiness, and family self-reliance. For the past several years KCS statewide annual report has included a recommendation for the department to advocate for the reallocation of funding to restore Community Resource workers in all school districts. The reallocation of funding by the legislators has not been possible up to this point.

#### Recommendation:

The Department should secure dedicated funding, including a workable match of state and school district funds, to increase the availability of CRFF for all school districts.

# C. Navigation

The Department needs to continue its support of Community Worker Programs and the Navigation Program and their ability to provide short term case management, family centered practice, and family assistance funding.

#### Recommendation:

Navigation services should be continued, supported, and more mobile and accessible to people who aren't able to access Navigation in Health & Welfare offices.

#### D. Educational Neglect

We are concerned about education neglect. There is currently no accountability to be certain that some children are receiving adequate educations who are not enrolled in school. We understand opposition of some home educators concerning their individual rights. However, while we applaud those home-schooled students who often receive superior education, we remain alarmed that home-schooling provides an opportunity for neglectful parents to hide their children from the public. We are concerned about:

a. Children who may be kept home to avoid detection of abuse; and

b. Children who are not given adequate education opportunities. Given the results from the BSU (Boise State University) report "Educational Neglect and Compulsory Schooling in Idaho," there are 13,954 reasons to take action.

The 2,921 Idaho dropouts from the academic year 2002-2003, will generate a net loss of between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion to the Idaho economy over their work careers.

Less than half of Idaho school districts were able to estimate the number of home-educated children within their districts. For the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 680,000 students attended more than 2,700 charter schools.

#### Recommendations:

- 1. The Department of Health and Welfare should partner with the Department of Education and the Home School Association to ensure that all children in Idaho are receiving an adequate education by defining educational neglect and developing a standardized monitoring and testing system.
- 2. The Department needs to work with this committee to specify the criteria for educational neglect, making it more feasible for law enforcement and child welfare to investigate, fund, and act on the problem.

## II. Retaining Professional Quality Staff

The following recommendation is made by the citizen volunteers to the Keeping Children Safe Panel, and is placed into the recommendation without editing by the Department of H&W staff. This has been unanimously endorsed and supported by the entire State Keeping Children Safe Panel.

Important skills and training are being lost from the Department of Health & Welfare. Within every region, Keeping Children Safe Panel members can recall the skills and training of important professionals and staff being lost. These losses were usually to pursue employment opportunities elsewhere. Often these lost staff members leave the Department because of a lack of professional challenge and recognition, and/or to improve their financial position.

The Keeping Children Safe Panel recognizes that the dangers of this continued drain of talented, trained, and experienced staff reduces the safety net for the Idaho's most vulnerable children. Continued staff losses affect the efficiency of the Department and result in either increased cost or decreased production. Idaho needs highly skilled, professionals in the Department of Health & Welfare.

## Compounding the Problem

Health and Welfare staff have had long "dry" periods with little or no increase in their salaries.

- Professionals within the department are not allowed to practice their profession outside the department on a part-time basis.
- The department does not have a clear, well-established career ladder which staff can advance without going into management.
- Several staff and professional members perceive few, if any, opportunities for personal advancement.

• Good job performance needs to produce a more tangible recognition than a pat on the back, if we are to have a positive impact on moral and increase self worth in the staff.

#### A Positive Start

Recently both the Idaho State Legislature and the Department have taken positive steps by a recent pay raise and investigating a career ladder. We of the Keeping Children Safe Panel applaud these efforts and the individuals who have brought them about.

#### Recommendations:

- That the department continue to develop a career ladder for employees that combines:
  - Advancement for additional training from in-services and university trainings.
  - Placement on a longevity scale, so each employee will have an increased income each year
  - Additional pay based on the difficulty of assignments within the employee's field of specialization
- The Department find a way so professionals may be employed or practice their profession, outside of the department without threat of a conflict of interest.
- The employee evaluation will be made, in part, by the employee's progress on a career development plan that they assisted in developing for themselves. The Department should make an effort to combine and summarize these plans and assist by offering trainings, classes and in-services to assist the employees in making progress toward their goals.
- From additional training and work experience, more advanced employees should be assigned more difficult cases. There should be a rank system which provides peer and community recognition for the employee, and impacts their pay as well.
- That professional appearance, conduct and performance be recognized with immediate, discretionary, one time funds awarded to the individual by the region supervisor.
- The Department should have a goal to encourage each staff member to grow professionally. Each Region's supervisor should organize training opportunities and in-service to support the general themes determined by the individual needs.

The Keeping Safe Panel endorses the Department's and the Legislature's efforts in keeping our valued employees. The lives of our most vulnerable young citizens are in the hands of the Department's professionals.

#### III. Foster Care

The panel recognizes and respects the contributions foster parents and families provide to the community. In order to better assist the families in their efforts, we recommend the following:

#### Recommendations:

- 1. Review and update Department policies and standards to allow children in foster care to participate in the same activities as their foster parent's own children.
- 2. Develop a checklist for foster parents to help facilitate the scheduling of medical, dental, and other appointments as deemed necessary and timely within Department standards. This checklist should be offered by the social worker at the time of placement as well as being made available on the Department's web site.

- 3. Advocate for an increase in funds for foster care reimbursement, training, and support services.
- 4. Partner with the Red Cross, local hospitals, or the American Heart Association to make CPR and First Aid training available in each Region two times per year. This would be in addition to training opportunities provided at the annual conference.
- 5. Provide respite care budgets to each Region that will allow foster parents to access at least 10 days of respite care per year.

#### IV. Older Foster Children

We are concerned that the older, aged-out, foster children are not being adequately served and/or tracked once they reach the age of emancipation. Therefore:

#### Recommendations:

- 1. The Department should evaluate the data management tools and reports so that accurate reports related to the Independent Living Plans and the completion of Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessments will be generated.
- 2. The Department should conduct an analysis of the cost of extending Medicaid services to all eligible aged out youth until they are 21.
- 3. The Department should develop a questionnaire to give older aged-out foster children a chance to express themselves when they leave the program. The results obtained through the use of these exit questionnaires will be given to regional managers for evaluation.

## V. Data Management and Technology

Technology continues to provide greater opportunities to track and compile data and to enhance direct practice services. Two areas the KCS Panels would recommend the Department focus efforts would be:

#### Recommendations:

- 1. Video phones and camera-equipped computers should be provided in the Department as an option for preserving family connections. Family connections are often difficult to achieve because of separation caused by distance, treatment facilities, incarceration, or safety of the child
- 2. Develop a FOCUS report to track visits between:
  - Social workers and the children, their parents, and resource families;
  - The children and their siblings; and
  - The children and their parents.

#### VI. Day Care

Keeping Children Safe is charged with reducing the risk in children's lives. Child care for parents employed during non-traditional hours may be unavailable, thus placing children at risk for potential harm. Lack of child care availability seems to be widespread regardless of socio-economics.

#### Recommendation:

Complete a statewide survey related to non-traditional child care hours (6 a.m. - 8 a.m., weekends, and holidays included) within a year.

#### VII. Services

We recommend that there be increases and changes in the services that will benefit child protection, families and our communities. These service areas include legal representation for the Department of Health and Welfare, family service techs, mental health and substance abuse. We would like to recommend the following:

#### Recommendation:

Increase and change the following services to benefit child protection, families, and our communities.

- 1. Legal representation for the Department of Health and Welfare
  - Continue efforts to ensure that there is adequate legal representation in child protection cases. Child protection workers are not represented in court and the panel suggests the importance for this through furnishing the appropriate representation. We request that the officials of the Department of Health & Welfare address making the Department a party to the case in the Child Protection Act.
- 2. Family Service Techs

Increase the number of Family Tech. Positions. Currently these staff spend the majority of their time transporting children. The job description for these positions includes numerous other skilled tasks that provide direct service to parents and children. The Department needs to explore other methods to ensure safe transportation of children. This will allow current and additional Family Techs. To provide much needed services such as parent assessments, group and individual parenting education, mentoring, modeling.

- 3. Children's Mental Health
  - Treatment facilities should be closer to rural areas so the children don't have to go so far from home for treatment.
- 4. Substance abuse

We recommend a stronger partnership amongst agencies at community, state, and federal levels to provide a comprehensive approach to substance abuse treatment. We recommend increased funding to the Department to facilitate this stronger partnership. Specifically we are concerned about the comprehensive treatment for the parents of minor children. We recommend the following ways to specifically use this increased funding and stronger partnership.

- a. Assistance with transportation costs for participants.
- b. Increased space for both inpatient and outpatient clients.
- c. Aggressive comprehensive methamphetamine education for school age children.

Thank you to the following Keeping Children Safe Panel members:

#### Region I **Region IV** Wilfred Ross – KCS Co-Chair Robert Specht – KCS Co-Chair Verna Gabel – KCS Co-Chair Tom Turco – KCS Co-Chair Jim McCuaig Charlotte Larson Beverly McCuaig Donna Parks Claudia Burtelow Mary Stackle Steve Olson Darleen Castillo Sheri Conrad – DHW Liaison Mary Vail Leah Stern Sara Shultz – DHW Support

## Ralph Kennedy - DHW Liaison

# Region II

Doris Ferguson - KCS Chair

Jean Roberts
Judy Hanby
Lura Abbott
Douglas Gidding
Kitty Geidl

Gaylene Strandbakke – DHW Brad Forth – DHW Liaison

Jennifer Chaffee – DHW Support

## **Region III**

Dyann Aspiazu – KCS Co-Chair Lorri Robb – KCS Co-Chair Vivienne Bristol Arleen Volgamore Amy Bava Travis Cronin – DHW Liaison

## Region V

Wes Fields – KCS Co-Chair Midge Fisher – KCS Co-Chair Hillari Walker Lorie Nebeker Jaime Nava – DHW Liaison

## **Region VI**

Charlie Piquet – KCS Chair Glenda Piquet James Elbrader Grant Thomas – DHW Liaison

## **Region VII**

Renee Hill – KCS Co-Chair Gene Lund – Co-Chair Julie Hill Janice McNee Jerry S. Johnson Melinda Drowns Marlene Bubar – DHW Liaison Cheryl Taylor – DHW Support

# KCS Statewide Panel Activities during 2007:

- Wrote letters to Mr. Tom Luna, Idaho's State Superintendent of Public Instruction about children who are being home schooled.
- In partnership with Lewis Clark State College, conducted a Child Care Survey to seek, identify, and understand the need for child care during non-traditional hours.
- Participated in "Love a Kid" Pillowcase Project to let a kid in a tough situation know that
  others care by presenting him/her with a pillowcase containing small things to call his/her
  own.
- Facilitated a meeting with community members regarding the Idaho Children's Trust Fund.
- Provided personal care items and back packs for children entering foster care.
- Sent letters of appreciation to all licensed foster homes in the Region.
- Visited the CARES Facility and were given a briefing on the activities that occur at the site.
- Shadowed case workers on home visits and attended foster family support groups.
- Promoted a Focus on Families Fair to help awareness of child abuse and child protection.
- Had booths at the Fred Meyer Safety Awareness Fair, Crime Prevention Fair, and Focus on Family Fair.
- Attended "Pay It Forward" conference for non-profit groups.
- Attended the National Keeping Children Safe Conference.
- Reviewed Casey Family programs as to permanency planning.
- Looked into the situation of foster young adults who attend college and how to support them.
- Made a checklist for foster parents.
- Identified the need to better garner community support and understanding for the Department and developed a PowerPoint presentation for community partners.
- Reviewed the Idaho Judge's Benchcards for Child Protection Cases document.

- Continued Operation Suitcase to assure each foster child receives a backpack of personal and comfort items when they are taken into care.
- Attended a regional Fatality Review.
- Received training in and participated in the CQI process of quarterly file reviews, which includes interview with parents, foster parents, social workers, and foster child if appropriate.
- Conducted an interview with social workers related to legal actions and procedures concerning children on their case loads.
- Reviewed child welfare cases.

Regional panels invited a large variety of speakers to present at panel meetings throughout the year.

- Home School Coalition from Region 1
- Deputy Superintendent of CDA School District
- Senator Joyce Broadsword
- Erin Cunningham from CASA
- Tiffany Renner from North Idaho College on the PRIDE Program
- Cheri Bush, Deputy Attorney General
- Nancy Hausner, Executive Director of Idaho Children's Trust Fund
- Boise Rescue Mission
- Casey Family Programs
- Mark Schultz, LMSW, Program Specialist
- Kathy Hammond, LSW, Foster Licensing and Adoption
- Kathy Chesler, LSW, Safety Assessor

## Training and Conferences in 2007:

Regional panels participated in a variety of local, statewide, and national training and conferences throughout the year.

- Attended the 5th annual Foster Care Conference
- Attended the Early Childhood Development Training on Building Resiliency in a Child.
- Attended the Teen Dating Violence training
- Attended a two day System of Care training sponsored by the Children's Mental Health Alliance
- Attended a variety of in house staffing sessions