

Casey Partnership – Foster Care Reduction Project JACKSON COUNTY DISCUSSION NOTES

The Department of Human Services, the Commission on Children and Families, and their Seattle based partner, Casey Family Programs are trying to engage community partners in helping to reduce the number of children in foster care. This initiative, proposed initially for eight Oregon counties (including Jackson County), has been designated as an Oregon Solutions project by Governor Kulongoski.

Casey Family Programs is a national foundation that has helped inspire and lead innovative efforts to successfully improve foster care systems across the nation. Casey has committed \$2.5 million to help achieve the following results by the year 2011:

- Reduce the number of children in foster care by 20%;
- Increase relative placements by 50%;
- Reduce Children entering foster care by 10%
- Increase Foster Care exits by 20%
- Significantly reduce the disproportionate number of Native and African American children in foster care (specific numerical goal to be set by end of 2009); and
- Hold the child abuse/neglect rate at or below 7.9%.

Children and Families Division Director Erinn Kelley-Siel emphasized on January 5 that the number one goal for children is safety, and that each of the above goals should be seen within the context of keeping children safe.

Primary strategies

The Department and the Commission have set forth four primary strategies to reach the overall goal of safely reducing the number of Oregon children in foster care:

1. *Fully implement the Oregon Safety Model*, a practice framework which, among other things, will make child removal decisions more objective and will lead to greater family participation in case planning;
2. *Reduce disparate outcomes for children and families of color* in the child welfare system;
3. *Increase placement with relatives* when children can not remain safely in their own homes;
4. *Support implementation of these strategies* by increasing the quality of data, increasing community participation, and increasing the agencies' ability to share information with stakeholders.

Role of Oregon Solutions

The mission of Oregon Solutions is to develop sustainable solutions to community based problems through partnerships between government, business, non-profit and civic organizations. Oregon Solutions provides a neutral forum and a process for engaging community partners in developing real, on-the-ground solutions. (For more information about Oregon Solutions, go to www.orsolutions.org.)

Jackson County team discussion: January 5

Summary and Overarching Principles:

- ◆ Primary connection is the family.
- ◆ Need Multi-faceted interventions that are integrated.
- ◆ 3 new initiatives already underway:
 1. Oregon Safety Model Implementation
 2. Reconnecting Families – target is 40 relatives for each child in foster care
 3. Recent Grant (Early Entry or Permanency)
- ◆ Who's missing from the table: Community resources that might help with solutions:
 - Public Schools? (Steve Buroski, ESD Superintendent)
 - Judges – Community Family Court
 - Head Start
 - CASA
 - Housing agency
 - Relief Nursery
 - Faith-Based organizations
 - Native American organization
 - Foster child?
 - YMCA or other potential family support resources

Goal 2 – Increase Relative Placement by 50%

- ◆ Jackson County data:
 - % of children with relatives as first placement: increase from 19% in 2005 to 22% in 2007
 - % of children in relative placement on last day of fiscal year: 28% (up from 25% in 2005)
- ◆ Current Work in this area:
 - Embraced the Casey Model years ago
 - Have a question they ask consistently for placement-is there a relative?
 - Certification staff available to do relative + Kith certifications as priority & do make exceptions when appropriate to standards on individual basis
 - Reconnecting Families Pilot & CASA joined together – 2 staff that do advanced search engine searches, etc. in the CW office.

- ◆ Strategies for improving:
 - Reconnecting Families program
 - Continued emphasis-need to be true to model
 - Permanency Grant
 - Pre-placement meetings: shown to be valuable but concern that they are too resource-intensive
 - FNC offered to accompany CW worker on assessment visits as a non-agency entity – can be a bridge to community and family resources
 - Involve CASAs
 - Other ideas: Relief Nursery can go to families with small children, and not just where there are drug allegations.

Goal 3: Reduce number of children entering foster care by 10%

- ◆ Jackson County data:
 - Reduction from 2005 (entrance rate of approx. 9% per 1000 children) to 2007 (approximately 6.6%)
 - Still above Oregon average of 6.1%
- ◆ Current Work in this area:
 - Prevention work by DHS staff difficult due to resources
 - DHS conducts child safety meetings
- ◆ Strategies for improving:
 - Have community resources accompany DHS workers on visits (e.g. Relief Nursery)
 - Parent mentoring
 - Use of community resources (such as YMCA) to support families in need
 - Interagency integration

Goal 4: Increase number of children exiting foster care by 20%

- ◆ Jackson County data: No data available at January 5 meeting
- ◆ Current work in this area:
 - Permanency Grant
 - Mentorship for parents so that they are able to take children back: for parents in treatment and recovery
- ◆ Strategies for improving:
 - Mentoring - Partners in Parenting model
 - Community agencies could support PIP
 - Community resources for parents (e.g. YMCA, Music lessons, etc.)
 - Idea: Use search engine for relatives for mentoring/support purposes as well as potential placements.

- Aftercare supports need to be identified
- Transition meetings
- Reconnecting Families model fully developed

Goal 5: Reduce disproportionality

- ◆ Jackson County data:
 - African-American entrants to foster care in 2007 were 5.0% while percentage of total children is 1.5%
 - Native American entrants to foster care in 2007 were 7.4% while the percentage of all children was 1.4%
- ◆ Strategies for improving
 - Recruit for foster parents, ethnic and language
 - Not sure why
 - Hispanic under representation and under-utilization of support services
 - Representation of Faith Based Community
 - Need discussion with Native American resources

Goal 6: Re-abuse rate not increased

- ◆ Jackson County data: (No data furnished at January 5 meeting)
- ◆ Current work in this area:
 - Many times Relief Nursery continues after CW closes case
 - Partners in Parenting
 - Certification of foster care
- ◆ Strategies for improving
 - Mentoring could address this
 - Supportive Housing will also be involved

General Questions:

1. Does DHS have the ability to do a “soft touch”?

DHS can do a voluntary, but because of our legal mandates we might not be the best for a “soft touch”.

2. So how do you catch them early when families are first getting into trouble?

Currently caseloads, etc. make this difficult for DHS – we used to have “preventative/restorative” cases.

This is the preventative/intervention dilemma with limited resources.

3. **Can we look at what the community can do to provide a safety net before child welfare has to get involved?**

Examples;

- Relief nursery
- Community family court
- Housing grant

4. Can we identify a population that we can impact with our limited resources?

- *Those with open cases but children not placed, etc.?*

5. Can we better coordinate services in the various plans and do them in a way that builds on success? Single document and case management coordinator? Can we expand on the community family court model?

6. Can we look at the things we've had success with in the past?

7. Can we as a community come together to reallocate some funding to accomplish common goals?

Next Meeting - Tentatively Scheduled for Thursday, January 29