



Department for Community
Based Services
Response to
Citizen Review Panel
Annual Report

September 30, 2021

Division of Protection and Permanency

INTRODUCTION

As required by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Kentucky maintains at least three citizen review panels (CRP) comprised of volunteers from around the state, who review aspects of the state's child welfare system and submit an annual report to the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Their report is also submitted to the Commissioner of the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS/department) and the state's Legislative Research Commission (LRC). The report is due June 30th of each year.

At this time, DCBS is submitting its required response to the LRC and the Governor. A copy of this response will also be provided to the ACF as part of its next Title IV-B Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR).

PANEL ACTIVITIES FOR SFY 2021

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2021, Kentucky's CRPs maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, there have been five active CRPs across the state with efforts to continue building into the remaining four DCBS regions. Over the past year, efforts to develop in the remaining four regions were stalled, as Kentucky's CRPs saw a decline in participation and membership in the current established CRP regions. The upcoming fiscal year will refocus efforts to bringing CRP meetings back to an in-person and/or hybrid setting with the goal to rebuild the memberships that were lost. DCBS leadership continues to support the expansion of CRPs throughout each region to ensure broad benefits from panel activities.

In the past, the Commissioner has met with panel chairs on a quarterly basis to allow opportunity for feedback and questions from the panels. However, due to shortages in panel membership, those meetings did not occur quarterly.

Some panel positions have now been filled and scheduling these meetings will be a priority in the upcoming fiscal year. The department values this relationship and prioritizes time and attention to the issues identified by the CRPs. CRPs provide an invaluable service to the department, their communities, and the children and families served within their regions.

DCBS is committed to fulfilling its obligations set forth in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and supporting the panels and their mission.

NORTHEASTERN PANEL

The Northeastern panel held their first meeting in February 2020. During initial meetings, members submitted proposals for a potential project, and the panel voted to initiate the *Strengthening Families Program* (SFP). The SFP is an 11 session, evidence-based parenting skills, children's social skills, and family life skills training program specifically designed for high-risk families. Parents and children who are seven years or older participate in SFP together.

The panel will offer SFP trainings through certified trainers available at no cost with materials provided by a local Tri-County Agency for Substance Abuse Policy (ASAP) Board. This will increase the available trainers in the community to provide SFP. Trainings will be provided via Zoom.

The Northeastern panel presented on SFP at the April 20, 2021, Community Collaboration Conference with 428 participants to gain community awareness of this panel's project. On June 18, 2021, Rev. Dr. Nancy Preston and CRP member retired Judge Lew Nicholls presented an online training on how to prepare students to establish and present training for the SFP to families in the local areas of their operation. Two students participated in the training and were taught how to administer and teach SFP. They were provided with all of the necessary skills, training, and tools needed for future participants and

presenters.

The panel hopes to continue to grow the number of community partners trained in SFP in order to expand their outreach across their region and state.

CUMBERLAND PANEL

In SFY 2020, panel members prepared and distributed a brief survey to evaluate the satisfaction of foster parents regarding DCBS infrastructure requirements and other varying components such as material received.

The panel analyzed the results reported in last year's CRP report. However, their focus this year was on recruitment, as their panel was the most affected by the pandemic due to being in a very rural area. Recruitment efforts included having members speak with other community partners about CRP, as well as speaking at Regional Interagency Council (RIAC) and Community Collaboration for Children (CCC) meetings.

The panel hopes to continue its efforts regarding increasing DCBS information and communication among foster parents and biological families once adequate membership has been achieved.

EASTERN MOUNTAIN PANEL

The Eastern Mountain CRP identified their continued area of focus to be parenting and strengthening parenting skills among all types of people who parent. As the panel saw a great response last year from their *Empowered to Connect* conference, this fiscal year they partnered with Show Hope to offer their *Hope for the Journey* conference.

This conference was open to the public in May 2021 and was structured so

that participants could complete the modules over the course of the month. A total of 71 people participated in the conference. The panel also offered training credits and certificates for foster and adoptive parents.

The panel plans to continue their efforts of assisting parents throughout Kentucky. They will also focus on recruitment and retention of panel members.

JEFFERSON PANEL

In SFY 2020, Jefferson CRP planned to hold their yearly *Hope and Healing* conference on March 13, 2020; however, it was cancelled due to the rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first, the panel delayed the conference to hopefully hold the in-person event in the fall of 2020. However, with the continued in-person health and safety precautions necessary during the pandemic, the panel was unable to hold their conference and continued to see a decline in membership.

The panel attempted to recruit members by speaking with KVC Health Systems and RIAC in Jefferson County. Building new membership will be the main focus in the upcoming fiscal year.

SOUTHERN BLUEGRASS PANEL

In SFY 2021, the panel continued their work with *Handle with Care*, and completed their fourth year in Fayette County Schools. *Handle with Care* provides school personnel with a notification when a student from their school has been identified by law enforcement at the scene of a traumatic event so that school personnel can be responsive to that child's needs in the days following the event. Chief Martin Schafer, Fayette County Public Schools, Chief Safety Officer, is the primary law enforcement personnel to interact with local law enforcement to increase participation from the Lexington Police

Department and the Fayette County Sherriff's Department, as well as the face of Kentucky's implementation of *Handle with Care*. This year, the panel recruited Shericka Smith, MSW, LCSW, with Fayette County Schools. Ms. Smith assisted CRP in the information gathering stage by developing a system to track data for *Handle with Care*. However, due to the pandemic, the numbers fell as children were attending school virtually. Ms. Smith and Chief Schafer have presented and assisted other counties across Kentucky's with implementing *Handle with Care*.

Additionally, the panel held their yearly *Conversation on Collaboration* conference. Each year, the panel selects a current topic to focus the conference on in hopes to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect. This year, the panel focused on the issue of systemic racism consisting of structures, policies, practices, and norms. The panel titled their conference: *Annual Conversation on Collaboration: Addressing the Elephant in the Room: Racism*.

The conference was held virtually, and featured discussions with speakers Dr. Antomia Farrell (Assistant Dean for Diversity – University of Kentucky), Dr. Quentin Tyler (Associate Dean – Director for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion & Acting Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Administration – Michigan State University), Carol Taylor-Shim, MS (Director of Diversity Office of Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice for Student Success – University of Kentucky), and Derek Feldman (Kentucky Refugee Ministries). The conference also recognized several DCBS workers for their outstanding work.

TWO RIVERS PANEL

The Two Rivers panel continued their focus efforts on their yearly *What Works in Child Welfare* conference and implementing *Handle with Care* in Warren County Schools. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, panel members met with Chief Martin Schafer (Southern Bluegrass panel member) regarding *Handle*

with Care and scheduling strategic planning and stakeholder meetings. However, those meetings were interrupted due to COVID-19. This SFY, panel members were able to meet with Chief Schafer and Shericka Smith, MSW, LCSW, regarding the implementation of *Handle with Care*. Panel members then spoke with Warren County Schools Director of Student Services, Todd Hazel. Mr. Hazel was very receptive to the information and had attempted to implement *Handle with Care* in Warren County, but was experiencing some roadblocks within the school system including overall awareness within the community and with staff. A good discussion was held between Chief Schafer, Ms. Smith, and Mr. Hazel on ways to assist in their school system.

Two Rivers panel also held their annual *What Works in Child Welfare Conference* on March 19, 2021. The virtual conference was successful with 72 participants. The panel members were able to assist Todd Hazel in increasing awareness of *Handle with Care* by having Chief Schafer and Ms. Smith speak at the conference. Other speakers included Tyler Hunter (CRP member and foster care alumni) and Cigi Luangrathkhomkeo (peer support for KY START). The conference also recognized several DCBS workers on their hard work.

AGENCY RESPONSE

Across the state, Citizen Review Panels provide support to the cabinet and families in each region. The work they put into conferences and projects is valued greatly by DCBS leadership as it continues to support reducing the risk of abuse and neglect in Kentucky.

With the world experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting health and safety measures, Kentucky's CRPs were resilient in pushing forward with their conferences, even during times of low membership. Most CRPs adapted to virtual platforms and continued finding ways to support the community, which shows great allegiance to helping families even when

faced with difficulties. The panels consist of dedicated professionals within the community, and DCBS leadership recognizes and truly appreciates the value they provide.

Leadership commends the response from the Northeastern panel to strengthen families not only in their region, but across Kentucky. The ability to provide and train communities with new resources is valuable to families, especially in areas where panel members have expressed that other community resources did not reach the eastern part of the state.

Though the Cumberland panel has experienced a decline in active membership, DCBS is appreciative of the hard work and efforts they hope to continue to bring to this rural community. DCBS is eager to see the continued work they will provide to assist families and community partners.

DCBS appreciates the outreach the Eastern Mountain panel has provided through their parenting conferences the past two years. Even in times of low participation, this panel continues to reach numerous families from the devoted work of its members. Their mission of ensuring children and caregivers have healthy relationships is so important to the families DCBS serves.

DCBS is thankful for the attempted efforts of the Jefferson panel as they planned to provide a valuable conference to recognize DCBS workers and promote self-care to correspond with their focus of worker retention. With added membership, DCBS hopes to see their next area of focus in helping their community.

Leadership applauds the Southern Bluegrass CRP on their continuation of the *Conversation on Collaboration* and *Handle with Care*. It is exceptional to see the work of this group reaching into other CRP regions across the state. This

panel's focus of providing information of current, relevant topics is valuable in so many ways to the community and families.

DCBS commends Two Rivers CRP's continued efforts with their annual *What Works in Child Welfare Conference*. It is amazing to see panels work together to provide resources and education to the community. The implementation of *Handle with Care* is a valuable asset to the families and children within the area.

Leadership thanks all the CRP members for their outstanding achievements in this SFY. The department looks forward to the upcoming efforts to regain membership in the established CRP regions and continued efforts to expand into all Kentucky regions. It is clear through the projects of these panels that the state's CRPs are so valuable to communities throughout Kentucky.