

MINUTES

Braam Oversight Panel
SeaTac Red Lion, Rainier Room
SeaTac, WA
October 6, 2008

Panel Members: John Landsverk (Chair), Jan McCarthy, Jeanine Long, Dorothy Roberts, Jess McDonald

Panel staff: Carrie Whitaker

Plaintiffs' Attorneys: Bryn Martyna, Tim Farris, Bill Grimm, Erin Shea

Attorney General's Office: Steve Hassett

DSHS Staff: Cheryl Stephani, Deborah Purce, Chris Robinson, Randy Hart, Debbie Willis, Bernice Morehead, Robin McIlvaine, Lee Doran, Jeff Petty.

Others: Laurie Lippold, Jennifer Strus, John Tarnai, Melissa Wade, Alia Griffing, Betty Hames, Paige Flink, Susan Maney, Jim Theofelis, Dann Flesher, Wanda Flesher, Corey Wood.

Note: The minutes are a general summary of discussion and do not attempt to document every comment. Several power point presentations and other documents were distributed at the meeting. These documents are available on the Braam Panel website. A list of the documents is provided at the end of the minutes. Their content is not summarized in these minutes.

The meeting was called to order at 11:05 am.

Introduction

John Landsverk noted that during the months since the last public meeting, the Panel had issued a revised Implementation Plan and had published its fifth Monitoring Report. He indicated that updates on these issues, as well as new data and compliance plans, would be provided during the two-day meeting.

Children's Administration (CA) Update

Cheryl Stephani introduced Chris Robinson, who is now leading Braam efforts for Children's Administration. Cheryl stated that Chris has many years of experience with the Department in a number of critical roles, including as a regional administrator, and would bring invaluable expertise to this process. In addition, she noted that Chris has spent the past couple of years leading CA's practice model development, making her an excellent person to help CA tie together several of its major reform efforts.

Cheryl noted that solution-based casework, the new practice model, is being piloted in three offices. The approach has been well-received by staff, who have appreciated the coaching and mentoring they've been receiving.

Cheryl stated that the Department plans to launch FamLink on December 8, 2008. Carrie Whitaker, representing the Panel, and Erin Shea, representing plaintiffs, had recently participated in a demonstration of FamLink to learn more about its capabilities. Cheryl stated that FamLink would be a tool to help staff do their work, rather than just a place to document activities. Training began last week for field staff, and 3000 agency staff will be trained. Cheryl also stated that CA is training others outside of CA who need to know about and access Famlink (e.g. the Ombudsman's office).

Cheryl noted that, like other states, Washington is forecasting a budget shortfall. The most recent revenue forecast predicted a \$200 million shortfall for the remainder of the current fiscal year, despite recent budget-tightening measures including a hiring freeze (which does not affect direct service staff). For the 2009-2011 biennium, a \$3.2 billion shortfall is forecasted.

Plaintiffs' comments

Erin Shea noted that plaintiffs had appreciated the FamLink demonstration, and that plaintiffs felt that the parties had been working together in a much more positive way over the past several months.

Update on Court process

John Landsverk noted that, in recent months, a major development in the Braam process related to an enforcement action in Court. John stated that this is somewhat outside the Panel's normal process, and asked Steve Hassett to give an update.

Steve noted that plaintiffs had initiated an enforcement action in the areas of monthly visits, caseload size, CHET screenings, and sibling visits and contacts. Plaintiffs had prevailed, with the Court agreeing on June 30, 2008 that the Department was out of compliance in these areas. The final Court order creates timelines under which the Department is expected to come back into compliance: compliance plans were to be submitted to the Panel by July 30, with an additional 60 days allowed for CA to work with the Panel to develop an acceptable plan if the first plan is not accepted by the Panel. Within 90 days of the acceptance of a compliance plan, the Court order requires the Department to show substantial progress in that area. Within 9 months of the acceptance of a plan, the Department is required to meet related benchmarks.

Steve reported that there had been a lot of collaboration with plaintiffs on the development of the new compliance plans, and that the parties had developed a better and closer working relationship. He noted that the Court has no direct authority over the Panel, and that the Court order creates a new set of timeframes that are somewhat different from those established through the Panel process. Steve indicated that the parties would be working together to determine how to work within the timelines. He also noted that no additional Court hearings are scheduled, although either party may request another hearing if necessary.

Erin Shea, representing plaintiffs' counsel, agreed with Steve's summary. She noted that the final Court order would be on the plaintiffs' BraamKids.org website by the end of the week.

Monitoring Report #5 *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_MonRept.ppt)*

John Landsverk noted that the Panel had published its fifth Monitoring Report on October 1, 2008. He indicated that, like in previous reports, the Panel had not included "grades." As a result, the Panel had decided that it would make sense to provide an overview of the report at this meeting.

Carrie Whitaker delivered a presentation summarizing the Monitoring Report (*Please see separate power point presentation for details*). The presentation provided information on the Revised Implementation Plan, the status of action steps in the recent Monitoring Report, and the status of the Braam outcomes. For Braam outcomes, the presentation reviewed performance during 2007, examining whether or not the annual benchmark set forth in the

Implementation Plan had been reached and by how much performance exceeded or fell short of the expectation. In addition, the presentation reviewed performance on the outcomes in comparison to the previous year, and looked at the magnitude and direction of change.

Laurie Lippold noted that the outcome for which the benchmark had been exceeded by the largest percentage relates to the supply of foster homes (as measured by the ratio of licensed foster care beds to children in licensed placements). She stated that this seemed inconsistent with frequent reports that there are not enough foster homes. Bill Grimm stated that the measure is very broad, and needs to look at the supply of foster homes by region, age group, and special needs of children. Jan McCarthy noted that informational reports will examine these issues. Steve Hassett pointed out that the Panel will also receive informational reports on foster parent retention. Cheryl Stephani summarized the Department's ongoing work with respect to foster parent recruitment, and stated that recruitment is a continuing effort and there will always be work to do in this area.

Laurie asked whether the ultimate goal for each outcome is shown in the Monitoring Report. John noted that it is not, but that all annual benchmarks can be found in the Implementation Plan. The group agreed that showing future and ultimate benchmarks in the next Monitoring Report would be useful so that readers are able to see the expected improvement without referring to a separate document.

John Landsverk commented that it is difficult to tell whether any real trends are being observed in the outcome data. This will be difficult to assess until there are at least 3 years of data. In addition, many of the outcomes show a very small amount of change (just 2-3%), which may actually reflect random variation.

Jeanine Long stated that she would like to see additional analysis of the data by region. Carrie noted that there was only one outcome for which the statewide benchmark was reached, but the performance was still found to be out of compliance because some regions lagged farther behind than allowed under the rules for this outcome (this is outcome F.3.2, related to the median number of days children are on runaway status). Jeanine indicated that she said she would be interested in seeing the number of regions, if any, that met the benchmark for each outcome.

Bill Grimm asked why there was such a large variation among the regions in the median number of days children are on runaway status. Chris Robinson noted that the longest medians occur in the most urban regions (Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane), in which there are more likely to be communities of youth living on the street. Chris stated that part of the compliance plan in this area will be for the Department to look at how these children's families, not just the youth themselves, are being served.

Jan indicated that she would expect that compliance plans would address regional variation for any outcome for which there are significant performance differences among the regions.

Steve Hassett noted that areas that are measured through the foster parent survey pose difficulties in terms of compliance planning, because by the time the data are available, the next performance period is almost over. In areas in which there is no administrative data, it is not possible to review performance more frequently in order to see whether there's been improvement.

Bill Grimm raised questions about data included in the reports related to timeframes for investigations of abuse and neglect for children in foster care. He noted that 50% of these investigations are not completed within 90 days, and he stated that even a 90-day timeframe is unacceptable. Cheryl explained that policy for timeframes for investigations has now been modified so that all investigations (including those for children in placement) are expected to be completed in 45 days. Steve noted that investigations of allegations at facilities or when law enforcement protocols must be followed can take a long time. He stressed that CA can and does take action (through stop placement orders, removal of children, or other mechanisms) to ensure child safety even before an investigation has been formally completed. Bill continued to express concern. Questions were also raised about why the data on timeliness of completion of investigations had not been factored into the relevant outcome (D 2.2, DLR investigation of CPS referrals). It was agreed that the Panel would need to discuss this issue. John Landsverk asked Bill to put plaintiffs' concerns in writing for the Panel's consideration.

John stated that he hoped the analysis of outcomes data included in the presentation had been helpful. He stated that, now that the Implementation Plan is set, the Panel wanted to begin talking in more detail about performance on the outcomes.

Laurie asked about the overall increase in the number of children in care in recent years. Lee Doran noted that the population of children in placement had increased by about 16% between 2004 and 2008. Chris Robinson stated that this was slightly more than the increase in the overall state population. Cheryl Stephani pointed out that there had been changes in neglect legislation during this time.

John noted that plaintiffs had suggested that the monitoring report include contextual data, such as the number of children in care and the number of foster parents. He noted that it hadn't been possible to incorporate this type of information in the most recent monitoring report, but that the Panel would like to work with the parties to do so in future reports.

Break for lunch

2008 Foster Parent Survey *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_survey.ppt)*

John Tarnai presented data from the 2008 survey of foster parents. He noted that 1,234 foster parents responded to the survey in 2007 and 1,350 foster parents responded in 2008. Only 146 responded to both surveys; thus over the two years the survey reached a large number of foster parents.

John Tarnai presented background on the approach and methodology, a summary of the data that had been used for Braam monitoring purposes, as well as data in several other areas. John's presentation also included comparisons to 2007 data. In addition, he provided some qualitative information based on statements from foster parents during the survey. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details).*

John Tarnai noted that a question had come up related to how the response rate had been calculated for the survey. He noted that the liberal way in which he calculated the rate yielded a response rate of 69%, but that with different assumptions, the rate could be as low as 53%.

Laurie Lippold asked whether data had been broken out for private agency and direct CA foster parents, and for licensed and unlicensed caregivers. John Tarnai noted that data by licensed v. unlicensed caregivers are already included in the reports. With respect to private agency data, this has been done for the 2007 survey, and will be done for 2008.

Steve asked whether the open-ended responses had been examined separately for licensed and unlicensed caregivers. John Tarnai indicated that they had not been, but that it is possible.

Dorothy Roberts asked whether any other researchers intended to do additional analyses of the data. Cheryl was not aware of any inquiries, and noted that the data are kept with John Tarnai at SESRC for confidentiality purposes.

2008 Survey of Youth in Foster Care *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_survey.ppt)*

John Tarnai presented data on the 2008 survey of youth ages 15-18 in foster care.

John Tarnai presented background on the survey approach and methodology, as well as a summary of the results. In addition, he provided some qualitative information based on discussion groups that had been held with youth around the state. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

A stakeholder noted that, if this is looked at as a customer service issue, the surveys show that 25-30% of customers are dissatisfied with the service they are receiving from DCFS in many areas.

Jan McCarthy noted that many foster parents and youth appear to be having good experiences, but that there is a small minority that is unhappy. She suggested that compliance plans should focus on this population. Jeanine Long urged the group to interpret the youth's responses with some caution. She noted that many teenagers will be somewhat discontented at points during their adolescence, and that not all of the dissatisfaction should be viewed as criticisms of the system.

Bill Grimm asked whether privacy concerns were an issue for youth responding to the survey. John Tarnai noted that the advance letter to foster parents had encouraged them to allow youth privacy to respond to the survey, and interviewers calling youth also asked at the beginning of the survey if the youth was in a comfortable place to be able to respond to the questions.

Bill Grimm noted that an average of 12 calls had been made for each youth. John Tarnai clarified that this represents an average of 12 calls for each completed interview, so that youth who were not reached, people who did not answer the phone, answering machines and voice mail, calls that were screened, erroneous phone numbers, etc were included. He noted that this is fairly standard with survey research, and was also complicated by the fact that attempts were made to contact youth above the age of 18 who had left the system and were therefore often difficult to contact.

Jess McDonald noted that the survey yielded a lot of interesting data, and asked how CA planned to use it. Cheryl noted that one issue that was highlighted in the surveys was the need for improved communication with foster parents. She stated that CA is meeting with foster

parents in each region on a quarterly basis, and through these meetings, they are working to clarify expectations of staff related to responsiveness, availability and communication. Jess agreed that communication is a challenge in child welfare and that there's no silver bullet on this issue; agencies always need to work hard in this area. Chris agreed, and noted that the practice model emphasizes improved communication.

Cheryl also noted that the survey did not provide clinical definitions of terms such as sexually aggressive youth or medically fragile children, and that the number of foster parents who indicated that they served these types of children may be larger than the number of children who meet the clinical definitions of these terms. Cheryl noted that this suggests that foster parents may feel they need more support to meet these kinds of needs.

Compliance Plans

John Landsverk explained that much of the remainder of the two-day meeting would focus on compliance plans in the areas of caseload size, monthly visits, CHET screenings and sibling visits and contacts. These areas were the subject of the recent enforcement action in Court. As a result, there has been a lot of discussion between the Panel and the parties over the past several months to develop compliance plans in these areas.

Caseload size compliance plan *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_Caseload.ppt)*

Cheryl Stephani provided an overview of the caseload size compliance plan, including some history related to allocation of funds and new positions, as well as an outline of the strategies CA intends to employ in order to further reduce caseloads. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

A stakeholder asked whether continued reduction in caseload sizes would be sustainable given the recent predictions for significant budget shortfalls. Cheryl agreed that budget issues will pose challenges for all state services, but noted that direct service positions are not affected by the current hiring freeze, and caseload size reduction remains a priority.

John Landsverk asked for clarification of a statement in a recent letter from CA that indicated that "focused resources" would be available to CA for a period of 6 months to work on strategies related to accelerating permanency, which will also result in reduced caseloads. Cheryl replied that these strategies are designed to be budget neutral. CA will be able to hire additional staff temporarily for these permanency efforts, but would need to make a separate request in order to extend this into the next fiscal year.

Jess McDonald asked for clarification of the home study process for adoptions, which is referenced in the caseload size compliance plan. Cheryl noted that CA had adopted a unified home study for licensure of foster homes and for adoptive placements. Chris Robinson added that home studies can be done by CA or by a child placing agency, but must be updated in order to be less than 12 months old at the time of an adoption.

Jan asked for clarification on the strategy related to termination of parental rights (TPR), and expressed concern about terminating rights if adoptive homes are not available. Cheryl agreed that this is a concern, and indicated that the goal is to accelerate both termination of parental

rights and completion of adoption home studies for children who are in placements that can become adoptive placements in order to accelerate the finalization of an adoption. Cheryl also noted that federal law stipulates that the Department must file a TPR petition for children who have been in care 15 of the most recent 22 months, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. Tim Farris asked whether data are available on compliance with that provision, and Chris noted that current data in that area are limited, but that FamLink will provide more information, especially with respect to whether compelling reasons exist. Steve Hassett said a recent study showed that TPR filings for children in care for 15 out of 22 months had taken place about 50% of the time, but that the study had been unable to examine compelling reasons.

John Landsverk noted that there were outstanding issues to be discussed related to caseload size data and the definition of children with special needs.

With respect to data, Cheryl indicated that the Department is working on developing reports to measure the percentage of workers with caseloads at or below COA standards, as shown in the compliance plan. This will factor in the case weighting formula approved by the Panel in the compliance plan. This is a significantly different approach from looking at average caseload size.

Cheryl also noted that the Panel had asked about how private agency cases are considered in the case weighting formula. Cheryl noted that the case weighting formula does not treat private agency cases differently, because CA workers still do a significant amount of work on these cases. This relates to an ongoing discussion between CA and its federal partners on the subject of monthly visits. Cheryl stated that CA has been seeking clarification as to whether the feds will accept monthly visits by private agency workers for the federal monthly visit requirement, and there has been significant discussion in this area. Currently, the Department is getting different and conflicting interpretations from Region X in terms of the expectations for monthly visits under the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) standard and the new Annual Program and Services Report (APSR) monthly visit requirement. The Department's understanding is that, under the CFSR standard, visits must be conducted by the "assigned caseworker," which would mean that private agency visits would not be counted.

Jess stated that any interpretation of federal guidelines that does not count private agency visits toward monthly visit timelines would be impossible for many states. He suggested that the Department formally asked for clarification on this issue, asking the regional office to reconcile the apparently conflicting interpretations.

John Landsverk noted that the requirement to achieve Council on Accreditation (COA) caseload standards also includes lower caseload expectations for children with special needs. The Department has proposed a definition of special needs that focuses largely on children with multiple status changes (including placement moves, hospitalizations, runaway episodes, etc) during a short period of time. The Panel has said that this definition is very different from how the Panel had been thinking about this issue, which relates more directly to children's special therapeutic needs.

Cheryl summarized the Department's rationale for its proposed definition. She noted that the Department does identify children with special therapeutic needs, and these children receive intensive services through Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) contracts with special agencies. This population includes about 10% of children in care, and these intensive contracts represent about 1/3 of the foster care budget. Although these children do have special needs,

the intensive services provided through these contracts often mean that these needs are being met, and these cases are therefore fairly straightforward from the perspective of the CA social worker. Therefore, the Department found that the cases that are most demanding for CA social workers are not necessarily children with therapeutic needs, which are often met through a private contract, but those who experience multiple status changes in a short period of time. The Department's proposed definition was built on that basis. Through discussions with regional offices, the workgroup reviewed and revised the definition until it encompassed cases identified by caseworkers as highly demanding.

Bill Grimm stated that the proposed definition is extremely complicated and restrictive.

Jan McCarthy asked whether agencies providing BRS services have caseloads at a 1:8 ratio. Chris Robinson replied that this is not necessarily the case, but that certain functions are performed by the CA social worker. Jess McDonald asked whether there are parts of the state in which there are no BRS providers and CA is directly serving cases with these more intensive needs. Chris replied that the provider array is different in different areas, and that sometimes services are also provided through the Medicaid system.

Jess McDonald noted that he understood the rationale for a definition that is based on the CA social worker's perception of which cases are most demanding, but he noted that it would be a difficult definition to plan around. If, for example, a child experiences multiple status changes and then fits the special needs definition, what relief would be available to lower the child's caseworker's caseload? How could this be managed when children would go in and out of the special needs status, as with this definition?

Tim Farris asked whether other states or jurisdictions had developed workable definitions of special needs. Jess noted that these issues are managed differently across different jurisdictions; for example, in some areas the private agencies serving children with special needs are themselves accredited and meet the caseload standards. Steve Hassett noted that very few public child welfare systems have gone through COA accreditation. John Landsverk commented that in San Diego County, a very small special needs unit handles medically fragile children, but children with behavioral health concerns are handled separately.

After additional discussion, it was agreed that CA would revise its proposed definition based on some of the concerns and ideas discussed during this meeting. Cheryl noted that CA wanted the definition to be a truly linked to caseworker workload. It was also agreed that it was important to develop a definition that is workable.

The meeting was adjourned for the day at 5:05pm.

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Panel staff: Carrie Whitaker

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Others: Laurie Lippold, Jennifer Strus, Alia Griffing, Betty Hames, Paiege Flink, Jim Theofelis, Dann Flesher, Wanda Flesher, Alisa Moore, Marna Miller.

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The meeting was called to order at 9:10 am.

Monthly Visit Compliance Plan *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_MonthlyVisits.ppt)*

Cheryl Stephani noted that there is overlap between caseload, workload and important casework functions such as monthly visits. She stated that the Department's approach to the monthly visit compliance plan focused on strategies to reduce workload in order to free up social workers' time to conduct monthly visits. Cheryl gave a presentation showing the history of funding and staff allocations related to monthly visits, as well as an overview of workload reduction strategies included in the compliance plan. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

With respect to data issues, Cheryl noted that questions related to federal requirements on monthly visits had been discussed the previous day. She stated that the Department was seeking to align the Braam measure and the federal measure on monthly visits, to reduce confusion that might arise if there were multiple approaches to measuring visits. She stated that, although both measures require a visit each and every month, the federal measure includes language related to half of all visits occurring in the home, and the Braam measure includes a requirement that not more than 40 days elapse between visits.

John Landsverk indicated that his understanding is that the question of how to handle the 40-day requirement is under discussion between the parties, and he urged the plaintiffs and CA to continue to work together on this. He noted that CA had proposed that the 40-day issue be separated from the outcome measure and be addressed through a separate informational report. He also noted that it would be impossible to achieve visits each and every month if there were many gaps of more than 40 days between visits.

Dann Flesher, foster parent, asked how the Department would enforce this policy. Cheryl stated that the Department was prioritizing this new policy and developing tracking and management tools so that supervisors and area administrators can work with social workers to ensure that all children are visited monthly. She stated that supervisors would work with staff to figure out how to address workload issues and make sure that all required tasks are completed, and that the Department takes a growth and development approach to implementation of the policy. As with other policies, if there is a consistent failure to meet expectations even after support from a supervisor, progressive disciplinary actions consistent with personnel rules would be taken.

John Landsverk noted that the Panel had requested that CA include in its compliance plan a review process to verify that monthly visits captured in administrative data represent actual visits. The Panel had felt that CA's proposal of a supervisory review of one case per caseworker per month was not adequate. John noted that Jess McDonald and Chris Robinson had met to discuss this issue. This issue is under ongoing discussion, and the Panel is hopeful that FamLink will facilitate a stronger review process.

Jan McCarthy asked what data are currently available on the implementation of monthly visits. Cheryl replied that, until FamLink is launched, monthly visits are being documented in CAMIS and CA is generating management reports at the office level. Steve Hassett noted that the monthly visit compliance plan had indicated that the Department would provide data on monthly visits to the Panel beginning on November 15 for the month of September, December 15 for the month of October, etc.

Jess McDonald asked about the federal expectations for monthly visits. Cheryl noted that the federal requirement is that, by 2011, 90% of children receive a visit each and every month. In the interim, states were required to submit targets for implementation, and were encouraged to set achievable goals. For the feds, the first review period begins in November 2008. Jess reiterated that it will be important to clarify the role of private agencies in monthly visits.

Dann Flesher, foster parent, asked about the Department's philosophy for implementing the monthly visit policy. He noted that, given limited resources, the Department could improve its compliance data by visiting some children each and every month, and other children not at all, rather than providing as many visits as possible to each child. Cheryl replied that monthly visits are a priority, and the expectation and intention is that all children will be visited every month. If there are workload issues, supervisors will work with social workers to determine what tasks can be done by other staff or can be delayed. She said that the Department's goal is good social work practice based on the needs of children in care, and that monthly visits are important for permanency, safety and well-being.

John Landsverk summarized that there remain two issues of ongoing discussion with respect to monthly visits: (1) measurement (including the clarification of the federal measure, as well as how to handle the Braam requirement that not more than 40 days elapse between visits), and (2) the development of a review process to ensure the validity of monthly visit data.

CHET Compliance Plan *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_CHET.ppt)*

John Landsverk noted that the Panel had accepted the strategies and approaches detailed in the Department's most recent compliance plan for the CHET outcome, but that the plan had not yet been approved by the Panel due to outstanding data and measurement issues.

Cheryl Stephani presented an overview of the Department's CHET compliance plan. She stated that the Department had identified several barriers to timely completion of the CHET screens, and had developed its compliance plan to address those barriers. Cheryl's presentation outlined strategies in the areas of timely educational records, medical exams, and behavioral health screenings. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

The decision to shift from using the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL) to using the Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17 (PSC-17) to assess children's emotional health was discussed. Cheryl Stephani noted that this tool had been selected after consultation with Eric Trupin and Lucy Berliner, and that the tool was much shorter, making it more likely that it could be completed in a timely manner. John Landsverk expressed his support for this change, noting that research on the PSC-17 suggested a strong correlation with the CBCL.

With respect to medical screenings, Bill Grimm asked whether the Department had data on the number of children entering foster care who already have a primary care physician. Barb Putnam replied that it would be possible to obtain that type of information, and that CHET screeners do have access to Medicaid records and are therefore able to tell whether a child has a relationship with a physician.

CA provided an update on issues related to data and measurement. It was noted that, because of changes in the CHET process and definitions, it would not be possible to build the tracking and documentation needs into FamLink at this time. Instead, a separate database is being developed to track CHET domains, which will be launched in December in conjunction with FamLink. The Department will be able to provide data to the Panel on CHET completions, including completion of each of the CHET domains, by the end of February 2009.

Panel members requested that they continue to receive information on CHET screenings from the existing database until the new system is launched. The Panel approved of the plan for the new database and the timeline for provision of data at the end of February 2009. Based on that agreement, the Panel noted that the CHET compliance plan could now be accepted. It was agreed that the Panel would issue a formal letter to approve the plan.

Sibling Visits and Contacts Compliance Plan *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_SiblingVisits.ppt)*

John Landsverk noted that the sibling visit and contact action step was the final compliance plan related to the Court order from the recent enforcement action. He noted that, as of September 1, the Panel had found the action step to be complete because CA has now implemented its sibling visit policy statewide. However, the recent monitoring report also found that the performance in 2007 on the sibling visit outcome failed to reach the benchmark. Therefore, although the action step has been found to be complete, a compliance plan is now needed for performance on the related outcome.

Cheryl Stephani presented an overview of the Department's recent efforts to increase the frequency of sibling visitation. She noted that policy had recently been implemented requiring two visits or contacts per month between siblings placed apart from each other. In addition, the 2007 supplemental budget included resources to allow CA to expand contract capacity to facilitate these visits. She noted that CA also encourages foster parents to arrange for sibling

visits directly, and provides reimbursement for mileage and activity fees associated with these visits. Cheryl noted that FamLink will have improved capability to track the frequency of sibling visits and contacts. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

Dann Flesher, foster parent, asked how visits are to occur when youth are placed in locations that are far apart. Chris Robinson noted that the policy does allow for contacts other than face-to-face visits, such as phone and email contact.

Formatting of Panel Reports

John Landsverk stated that there had been discussion within the Panel related to the formatting and presentation of Panel reports.

Jan McCarthy stated that she feels the Panel's Implementation Plan has been significantly clarified, but is not user-friendly and is not a document that anyone who is not already involved in the Braam process would want to look at. She suggested that an improved design of this document might make it more likely that social workers, foster parents, legislators or other stakeholders would review the document, and therefore have a better understanding of Braam. She asked the parties and stakeholders for feedback on the idea of spending some of the Panel's resources, approximately \$2,000, on a designer to improve the formatting and readability of the document, with no change to the content itself. She noted that the Panel was well-aware of resource concerns given the growing budget shortfall, and did not want to proceed with such a project unless the parties and stakeholders felt it would be useful.

Dann Flesher, foster parent, expressed support for this idea, and stated that he had been concerned that some social workers and others are not familiar with Braam.

Steve Hassett stated that he thought that the Panel's documents are clear to those with the greatest need to use them—primarily the Department and the plaintiffs. He noted that the Panel's documents are not intended to be a guide for social workers or foster parents and that it is the Department's responsibility to ensure that social workers and foster parents understand what is required.

Jess McDonald stated that there may be a larger issue of how the Panel presents information, and he suggested that Panel reports should include more historical information and include all relevant information in one document, without the need to cross reference from one report to another. He noted that is as important to summarize documents as to make them more attractive.

Laurie Lippold stated that the idea of a more attractive document is appealing, but she agreed with concerns about spending funds on something that is not absolutely essential given the current budget situation. She agreed with Jess, and stated that it would be helpful if Monitoring Reports clearly display past performance, as well as the benchmark expectations for future years, and that they be summarized.

Jim Theofelis noted that the Panel has a difficult challenge in terms of having multiple audiences for its reports. He suggested the idea of dashboard reports, providing at-a-glance information on critical indicators.

Other participants discussed ideas such as greater use of graphs, and development of an improved format that could be a template for future Monitoring Reports.

Chris Robinson stated that she would not be supportive of expending funds to hire an outside designer to format Panel documents, but that many good suggestions had emerged from the discussion that could be implemented by people already involved in the process. She suggested that she, Carrie Whitaker, the plaintiffs, and others work to develop a template for future reports that incorporates these ideas. John Landsverk agreed that this was a good suggestion.

Statewide Disproportionality- Presentation *(also refer to separate power point presentation, available on Braam Panel website at http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_WSIPP.ppt)*

Marna Miller of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) presented the findings from the statewide Racial Disproportionality Committee's analysis of data on issues related to racial disproportionality in child welfare in Washington. Marna's presentation analyzed disparities with respect to involvement in the child welfare system at several decision points: referral, acceptance of referral, risk tagging of the referral, removal from the home, placement in foster care for more than 60 days, and placement in foster care for more than 2 years. The analysis examined the disproportionality index for each racial group (African American, Indian, Hispanic, and Asian), comparing each group's involvement at each point in the child welfare system to that of white children. *(Please see separate power point presentation for details)*

Dorothy Roberts asked why the analysis had not examined substantiation of investigations. Marna stated that they had attempted to do this, but had found that referrals for many children who were ultimately placed were never substantiated. Dorothy expressed surprised. After further discussion, the group agreed that different jurisdictions handle issues related to substantiation very differently.

There was also discussion of the meaning of a "high risk" tag. Chris Robinson explained that the assessment of risk was made at the point of intake based on information provided in the referral and/or a history of referrals. She noted that CA takes some action for all accepted referrals, whether or not the referral is tagged as high risk. Some referrals with a lower level of risk are handled through an alternative response system, while higher risk referrals are investigated. John Landsverk noted that the proportion of referrals that lead to placement of the child in out-of-home care is approximately 11%, which is comparable to national data. In addition, he observed that patterns shown in the Washington analysis, such as the overrepresentation of Native American and African American children, and underrepresentation of Asian children in child welfare services, is very consistent with findings in other states.

Marna explained that additional analysis of the data had been conducted to control for factors such as family composition (single parent household) and income levels. This analysis had the result of lessening, but not eliminating, the rates of disproportionality.

John Landsverk asked whether the Panel would want to look at data by race and ethnicity for Braam outcomes on an adjusted (controlling for other factors) or unadjusted basis. Lee Doran noted that producing adjusted data would require working with other administrative databases. Dorothy Roberts argued against the use of adjusted data, noting that the Panel's stated purpose of looking at data by race and ethnicity was to examine whether children of all races

are achieving the Braam outcomes at the same level and receiving comparable services. Chris Robinson agreed that adjusting the data for the Braam outcomes does not make sense.

Deborah Purce noted that national data are clear that actual rates of abuse and neglect are comparable across all racial and ethnic groups, and therefore there are other factors contributing to involvement in child welfare agencies. She stated that the racial disproportionality committee's next step is to make recommendations for remediating the disparities that the data describe. These recommendations are due to the legislature on December 1, 2008, so that Deborah will be able to provide more details on the recommendations at the next Panel meeting. She noted that the committee is conducting community outreach as it develops its recommendations, including work with tribal communities, birth parents, and alumni of foster care. She said that the remediation plan would also call for additional data analysis.

There was additional discussion of issues related to Native American children, including the relationship between the state child welfare system and the tribal systems. Deborah Purce noted that tribal communities have speculated that the Indian children reflected in these data who remain in DSHS care, rather than being transferred to tribal custody, are more likely to be Native American youth who live in urban communities and/or youth who are not part of Washington-based tribes. The advisory committee would like to look at this issue more closely.

Jim Theofelis stated that, for mandated reporters, guidelines need to be clear. Deborah agreed and stated that the committee wants to be sure to not in any way discourage reporting of suspected abuse or neglect. The committee will be talking to mandated reporters as part of its work.

John Landsverk thanked CA and WSIPP for an excellent presentation. Dorothy Roberts stated that she looked forward to continuing this discussion and to looking at Braam data by race and ethnicity.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45pm.

Related Documents

A number of power point presentations that were part of the October 6-7, 2008 Braam Panel public meeting are referenced in the meeting minutes. These presentations are available at the Braam Panel website:

- Presentation on Monitoring Report #5:
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_MonRept.ppt
- Presentation on 2008 Foster Parent Survey and Survey of Youth in Foster Care:
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_survey.ppt
- Presentation on Caseload Size Compliance Plan
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_Caseload.ppt
- Presentation on Monthly Visit Compliance Plan
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_MonthlyVisits.ppt
- Presentation on CHET Compliance Plan
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_CHET.ppt
- Presentation on Sibling Visits and Contacts Compliance Plan
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_SiblingVisits.ppt
- Presentation on Racial Disproportionality
http://braampanel.org/MinutesOct08_WSIPP.ppt