

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

OHIO'S CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW

FEBRUARY 25, 2003

CHILD WELFARE IN OHIO

Child welfare services in the State of Ohio are delivered in a state-supervised, county-administered environment. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) is the designated state agency responsible for:

- Administering state and federal children services funding.
- Developing rules for accepting and investigating reports of known or suspected child abuse or child neglect and providing services to children and families.
- Developing rules governing the operation of foster homes, group homes, children's residential centers, private child placing agencies, and private non-custodial agencies.
- Overseeing the operation of public and private children services agencies to ensure compliance with federal and state laws and regulations.
- Providing technical assistance to public and private children services agencies.
- Licensing private children services agencies and certifying foster homes.
- Overseeing the training program for public children services agency staff.

Ohio's 88 county public children services agencies are responsible for:

- Receiving and investigating reports involving any child alleged to be abused, neglected, or dependent.
- Providing protective services and emergency supportive services to allow children to remain in their own homes.
- Accepting temporary or permanency custody of children from the court.
- Providing out-of-home care for children who cannot remain at home, while providing services to the family directed at reunification.
- Recruiting and maintaining foster and adoptive homes.
- Placing children in adoption or other permanent living arrangements.
- Providing independent living services to assist children as they transition from being in agency custody to independence.

In recent years, more than 100,000 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect have been received annually by public children services agencies. On January 1, 2002 a total of 21,239 children were in substitute care placement while intensive services continue to be provided in order to reunite children with their families. The state median number of days for length of stay in out-of-home care is 208 days.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW

As required by the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, in 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services began reviewing state and child welfare services programs using performance-based outcomes to identify both the strengths and needs of State programs. (This makes the first time the federal government has reviewed state child welfare service programs using performance-based outcomes.) The reviews *examine* the delivery of child welfare services and the outcomes for children and families served by child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services. The primary elements of the review included:

- A State's self-assessment
- A week long, on-site review of 50 cases, that was conducted during the week of May 20, 2002 in three of Ohio's 88 counties

OHIO'S RESULTS

In January 2003, Ohio received the results of its first Child and Family Services Review from HHS. Ohio welcomed this review as a valuable tool to help improve our child welfare system. The review pointed out strengths as well as areas needing improvement. The results will be used in tandem with continuous quality improvement initiatives the department is already engaging in to attain the goals of safety, permanency, and well being for all children who come into contact with public child welfare systems.

OHIO'S STRENGTHS

The report acknowledged that Ohio should take pride in those areas found to be strengths in its child welfare system. It was also pointed out that Ohio's state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system is structurally sound and able to deliver services.

The following strengths were highlighted:

SAFETY FOR CHILDREN

- Agencies were making diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring the child's safety.
- Agencies were consistent in their efforts to reduce risk of harm to children.

PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN

- Agencies are establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner for children.
- Agencies are providing services to children to help them make a successful transition from foster care to independent living.
- Agencies are placing children in foster care in close proximity to their biological families.
- Agencies are making special efforts to place siblings together in foster care, when in the children's best interest.
- Agencies are promoting frequent visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings (in foster care) and are supporting and maintaining the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

- Worker's were visiting children in foster care with sufficient frequency to monitor their safety and ensure their well-being.

OHIO'S AREAS TO BE IMPROVED

The report also identified the following areas for improvement.

SAFETY OF CHILDREN

- Agencies need to develop strategies for reducing the incidents of repeat abuse and neglect.

PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN

- Agencies need to reduce the number of moves a child experiences while in foster care, reduce the time a child spends in foster care, and locate permanent placements for children more quickly.

WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

- Caseworkers need to do a better job of assessing children's needs, involving families in decisions, and matching families' needs with available services. Special attention should be directed at meeting the educational, physical and mental health needs of Ohio's children.
- Agencies need to involve parents, children and foster parents in case planning and reviews of their cases.

NEXT STEPS

Ohio's child welfare system is a community responsibility. The public children services agency is not the only agency responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and well being of Ohio's children. Also achieving the federal performance indicators does not ensure that Ohio's children served by the child welfare system are safe. The quality of our children's lives depends upon the performance of all its parts, including families, juvenile courts, legal professionals, medical and education personnel, substance abuse and mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel and a multitude of state and local public and private agencies working together.

The ODJFS Office for Children and Families and 88 county public children's services agencies take seriously the job of protecting Ohio's children in need and recognize that there are areas where improvements are needed. In fact, some improvements required as a part of Ohio's Program Improvement Plan, due to HHS by April 7, 2003, have already been implemented: Including:

- Development of a safety assessment for utilization by public children services agency caseworkers;
- Completing the integration of the federal standards into our existing county monitoring tool, (*CPOE*), in order to achieve greater consistency. *CPOE* evaluates the quality of child welfare services, identifies strengths and needs of Ohio's service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures that are in line with the *CFSR*;
- Roll-out of a Data Analysis Report Tool to assist public children services agencies in easily analyzing their data;
- Working toward Children's Services accreditation in all 88 counties and the ODJFS Office for Children and Families;
- Refining and implementing Ohio's Public Children, Adult and Family Services System Strategic Plan.
- Creation of a new data system (*SACWIS*) that will provide county staff with a case management tool.