

The Wyoming Citizen Review Panel's mission is to review our child welfare procedures throughout the system offering summaries and recommendations for improvements benefitina children and families.

# Wyoming



**Citizen Review Panel, Inc.**

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## ***“The story behind the data, through the eyes of citizens”***

**DATE:** September 26, 2006

**TO:** Richard Linson, District Manager - Child Protective Services  
Shad Bates, Regional Manager - Juvenile Services

**FROM:** Kelly J. Hamilton, Wyoming Citizen Review Panel

**RE:** September 2006 Mini CFSR Review; District 8 and Region 3

### **Executive Summary:**

This third round of Wyoming Child and Family Services Reviews (commonly referred to as Mini CFSRs) were held September 25 and 26, 2006 in Douglas and Lusk. Review teams reviewed two child protection cases and two juvenile services cases from the Douglas Department of Family Services (DFS) Office and one child protection case from the Lusk DFS office.

The review results were positive for both Douglas and Lusk DFS offices; out of a combined total of 115 items scored, only three items were rated as areas needing improvement and all were in the area of permanency which unfortunately is not an uncommon finding in Wyoming and across the nation as child protective agencies struggle to achieve permanency for children. All three areas needing improvement were documented in the Douglas review and it was apparent from the case reviews and subsequent discussions at the debriefing that those three areas needing improvement can be attributed to the influence that methamphetamine had in the two child protective cases.

Given the methamphetamine influence in Douglas this was a good review indicating effective case work: Part of the reason for these scores can be attributed to the fact that the child protection unit in Douglas has caseload averages of approximately 13. This supports the fact that children and families receive better services, and subsequently cases score better in the Mini CFSR process, when caseworkers have lower caseloads; well under the national average which is in the mid twenties.

While juvenile services cases scored very well, the juvenile services case worker in Douglas had a case load of 35 as recent as August of 2006, well above the national and recommended average.

The DFS caseworker in Lusk is responsible for both child protection cases and juvenile services cases; a concern was raised in the debriefing meeting that this may possibly exclude that worker from being able to “specialize” in one or the other. However there appears to be good coordination between the two types of cases and this is something that the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel (WYCRP) endorses as statistics indicate that juvenile services cases often begin as child protective cases but are not recognized and dealt with as such. Further, the worker’s supervisor is in the child protection unit and may not necessarily be getting all the juvenile services information, policies and procedures to share with the caseworker.

**Safety:**

The outcome of safety is divided into two subcategories: “Safety 1” (children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect and “safety 2” (children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate).

During this third round of reviews, ratings in both of these outcome areas were either rated as “strength” or “not applicable” to the case being reviewed. In our 2006 Annual Report, the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel reported that when DFS becomes involved, children appear to be safe; both Douglas and Lusk DFS offices scored well in safety during the first and second round of reviews as well.

**Permanency:**

The outcome of permanency is divided into two categories: “Permanency 1” (children have permanency and stability in their living situations” and “permanency 2” (the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children).

The item ratings in the area of permanency 1 for Douglas and Lusk were rated as strengths or not applicable to the case being reviewed with overall outcome ratings of substantially achieved.

In the outcome area of permanency 2, two Douglas cases reviewed three item ratings of “areas needing improvement.” At the debriefing meeting, participants agreed that these ratings were probably not because of anything further DFS could or could not have done, but the combination of methamphetamine use in both cases, domestic violence, suicide and parents either incarcerated or “on the run” to avoid incarceration. This finding further emphasizes the influence that methamphetamine has on young parents in certain parts of Wyoming. These ratings gave Douglas three overall outcome ratings of substantially achieved and one of partially achieved in this outcome area.

The review in Lusk recorded ratings of “strength” on all items in the outcome area of permanency for an outcome rating of substantially achieved.

**Well Being:**

The outcome of well being is divided into three categories: “Well-being 1” (families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs), “well-being 2” (children receive

appropriate services to meet their educational needs) and “well-being 3” (children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs).

In the area “well-being 1” all item ratings in Douglas and Lusk received ratings of strengths and outcome ratings of substantially achieved.

In the area “well-being 2” all item ratings in Douglas and Lusk received ratings of strengths and outcome ratings of substantially achieved.

In the area “well-being 3” all item ratings in Douglas and Lusk received ratings of strengths or non applicable for outcome ratings of substantially achieved.

In our 2006 Annual report, we commended DFS case workers for “getting involved and advocating” in the best interest of children. One case involved a three year old child whose father committed suicide in the child’s presence. As the child entered school, while living with grandparents in another region of the state, it appears that school officials were hesitant to do any assessments to see if the child may need any counseling. The DFS case worker from Douglas worked with the grandparents and got the child the needed assessments.

A complete listing of the 23 items, along with the outcome categories used in the Wyoming Mini CFSR instrument are listed in Appendix A.

### **Contributing Factors:**

It is the intent of the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel to do more than just highlight data: The WYCRP looks for various observations that are worthy to note and may help to explain the story behind the data in an effort to promote best practices throughout the state. Each DFS office will have received the statistical data rating from their review both at the exit meeting and via email prior to receiving this report; we encourage the review of that data in conjunction with these observations.

In the past several years, many sources have noted the influence that methamphetamine has on Wyoming, particularly in certain portions of the state; unfortunately the case review process shows that Converse County appears to be one of those areas where methamphetamine creates a significant portion of DFS case loads. Fortunately, workers in Douglas are doing an excellent job of insuring safety, permanency and well being for children left in the wake of the methamphetamine wave.

The current methamphetamine era in Wyoming causes some children to go long periods of time without seeing their parents despite the best efforts of DFS; both of the child protective cases in Douglas did not score as strongly in the broad outcome area of permanency due to the unpredictable, methamphetamine influenced behavior of the parents involved; one parent committed suicide in the presence of his three year old child.

The review did indicate that the DFS office places a strong emphasis on the use of relative placements when available and appropriate.

We have in the past concurred with DFS that the family centered practice model should be used with increasing frequency around the state. Adding further recognition of the benefits of using that method, one DFS case worker commented that: "While our case demonstrates excellent social work practice, the DFS worker could have saved themselves a lot of time and leg work if a family partnership meeting would have been done."

It is interesting to note that the two juvenile services cases reviewed both began as child protection cases and were changed to juvenile service cases at some point in time.

**Conclusion:**

It appears that Douglas, which is geographically situated on the border of large scale methane gas production, suffers the impact of an influx of energy extraction workers. Unfortunately methamphetamine can also be a part of this subculture and the associated impact. In all three areas needing improvement in Douglas the influence that methamphetamine had on young parents caused them to put the drug before their children resulting in the ratings of areas needing improvement. DFS caseworkers appear to have done what they could in these cases to work with the families and certainly insured the safety of the children while considering and using relative placements. Further, the reasonable caseload averages of 12-13 for child protective service workers in Douglas (average calculated on September 28, 2006) emphasizes the need for lower case loads in other DFS offices.

Appendix B is a compilation of comments gathered from the debriefing meeting for the Douglas and Lusk reviews and from the exit meeting held for the series of reviews in Douglas, Lusk, Torrington and Wheatland during the week. Comments are categorized as strengths, additional contributing factors not previously mentioned, opportunities for improvement, systemic barriers, review process dynamics and comments, district and regional concerns and goals and big picture/state office issues. These comments may or may not represent the official position of the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel.

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## Appendix A

Wyoming Mini CFSR items are listed below with category explanations *highlighted in blue*. Individual item ratings contribute to the corresponding category rating in the review process.

### *S1-Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect*

**Item 1** = Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

**Item 2** = Repeat maltreatment

### *S2-Children are safely maintained at home*

**Item 3** = Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

**Item 4** = Risk of harm to children

### *P1-Children have permanency and stability in their living situations*

**Item 5** = Foster care re-entries

**Item 6** = Stability of foster care placement

**Item 7** = Permanency goal for child

**Item 8** = Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

**Item 9** = Adoption

**Item 10** = Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

### *P2-The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children*

**Item 11** = Proximity of foster care placement

**Item 12** = Placement with siblings

**Item 13** = Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

**Item 14** = Preserving connections

**Item 15** = Relative placement

**Item 16** = Relationship of child in care with parents

### *WB1-Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs*

**Item 17** = Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

**Item 18** = Child and family involvement in case planning

**Item 19** = Worker visits with child

**Item 20** = Worker visits with parent(s)

### *WB2-Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs*

**Item 21** = Educational needs of the child

### *WB3-Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs*

**Item 22** = Physical health of the child

**Item 23** = Mental health of the child

For further definition explanations, the entire Wyoming Mini CFSR instrument is available for review and downloading at <http://www.wycrp.org/page9.html>.

## Appendix B

### Strengths

- “Family and child feel that the child is better for having been on probation”
- “Good work on the case overall”
- “Just the right amount of case work”
- “Young lady did not like being on probation, but reports that it is the best thing that could have happened to her in the long run”
- “Case worker was faced with many challenges and resolved them”
- “Family centered practice theories that were used were just excellent; opportunities were sized to get as much done as possible”
- “Good coordination between all parties involved including FCS”
- “Treatment team did a great job including child and parents”
- “Professionals involved allowed the girl’s goal to go home with her mother happen; they empowered the girl to complete the goal”
- “DFS offered services for transportation for mom and child to see one another”
- “Case worker has had case from beginning to end; case worker has 24-25 cases”
- “Extended family was involved in the case planning”
- “Case worker advocated with grandmother to get the child into counseling even when the school did not think it was necessary”
- “Douglas DFS office is very calming and welcoming”
- “Guardians were very complimentary of the Douglas DFS office”
- “Case worker is well liked”
- “Community appreciates DFS”

### Additional contributing factors

- “Not everyone agreed in MDTs”
- “Should child have been on probation for such minor offenses?”
- “Too much focus on the parent’s behavior, and child was largely ignored; all the focus on mom made it difficult to work with her eventually”
- “Mother was given the consequence that if she did not go to Cheyenne from Douglas and visit her child, she would not be allowed to have the child home for the holidays”
- “Resilience of the kids”
- “Good coordination between law enforcement and DFS in converse county”
- “Boy is smart”
- “Parents are in counseling”
- “Parents love their son”
- “Boy believes that he is better off at Cathedral Home”
- “Lusk and Pinedale DFS social worker do both CPS and JS cases”
- “Mother has abuse issues that have never been addressed and as a consequence will never “deal with officials” again”

## Opportunities for improvement

- “Family partnership meeting can usually save the DFS worker leg work”
- “It was suggested by a DFS reviewer that when a DFS person assigns a case with methamphetamine involvement, it might be best to assign it as a prevention case (when the case does not have credible evidence) as an alternative to having to make the 24 hour response”
- “ICPC was not done before mom left WYSTAR then she left state; moved to South Dakota”
- “No office case plan meetings”
- “Case plan was not in file, every body says it was done though”
- “Case plan was done late; but everyone knew what the goal was for the case”
- “Everybody thought they saw the case worker, but not documented as well as it could be in the case”
- “Parents do not get any sort of reports from facilities; ie incident reports and monthly reports”

## Systemic Barriers

- “Child had four counselors at Solutions for Life”
- “Services are not offered locally”
- “Grandmother had to “fight” the school system to get the child into counseling regarding the suicide of the dad; child was 3 years of age at the time and may have observed the suicide. School did not feel that any assessments and/or follow-up counseling was necessary”
- “Mom was too busy living drug life and the system could not really do anything”
- “Timely review hearings are difficult to obtain”
- “No shelter care hearing (10/14-10/20), then a few weeks later a stipulation was issued (11/1)”
- “Parents are “scared” to ask facilities for copies of reports involving their children for fear of retaliation of their child in the facility”
- “Need for more resources in Lusk; one foster parent home in Lusk and no crisis beds in Lusk”
- “Substance abuse treatment not available (creates visitation obstacles)”
- “Waiting lists for treatment”
- “Incarcerated parents creates visitation obstacles with regards to bonding with children”
- “Juvenile detention issues:
  - Education
  - Visitation
  - No DFS control without adjudication
  - No ability to do casework
  - Mental Health
  - Placement and custody without adjudication
  - Funding issues
  - Delayed adjudication

- Delays effective casework”
- “Juvenciles on adult probation placed in juvenile facilities”
- “Limited counseling resources”
- “Length of time to get psychological evaluation”
- “Adults (ie 18 year olds) on juvenile petitions”
- “Guernsey school has a limited response to juveniles with disabilities”
- “Communication with adult probation when parents on probation”
- “Limited service resources in rural settings such as TFC and substance abuse treatment not available locally”

### **Review process dynamics and considerations:**

- Citizen reviewers in this review consisted of:
  - a CASA volunteer and foster parent;
  - a foster parent and candidate for the state legislature;
  - a community professional in juvenile services;
  - a child advocate, and
  - a public health official.
- The period under review was July 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005.
- All cases were randomly selected and consent was given by the appropriate party for each case reviewed.
- Training was held for reviewers on September 20, 2006.
- The review instrument that is used considers 23 specific items in the broad outcome areas of safety, permanency and well-being (see listing in Appendix A.)

### **District and regional concerns and goals (*from exit meeting not necessarily specific just to Douglas and Lusk DFS offices*):**

- More emphasis will be given searching for absent biologic parent
- Hire a MDT coordinator (juvenile services)
- Continue to increase family partnerships
- Invite Lusk generic worker to juvenile services staff meetings
- Juvenile services does not have access or control of foster homes
- A juvenile services foster care coordinator may be beneficial
- Possibly open up therapeutic foster care to other providers and encourage therapeutic homes providers to develop programs

### **Big picture/state DFS office issues (*from exit meeting not necessarily specific just to Douglas and Lusk DFS offices*):**

- Can district 8 MDT’s meet requirements for family partnerships?
- Coordination for supervisor and generic worker in Pinedale and Lusk
  - Working generic cases
  - (APS, CPS, JS)
  - Data entry coordinating (YFS, JS, CPS)
- Flexible funding for FPM recommendations
- Caseload distribution (especially Juvenile service cases)

- FCS contract outside Cheyenne is used because of funding
- School system not buying into family centered practice
- Look for ways to engage school personnel in training
- DOC will not come to MDTs or family partnerships

2006/09/28