**Johnson County Department of Family Services Review**

Date of Review: February 3-4, 2015

The Wyoming Citizen Review Panel (WYCRP) conducted interviews of staff and community stakeholders to compile information about the state of child welfare in the Laramie County area.

Total Interviews:

DFS Staff – 4

Community Stakeholders – 17

Foster Parent Meeting -9

**Johnson County Demographics:**

* As of 2013 Johnson County’s population was 8,628 people.

**Strengths:**

1. The CPS department has a great working relationship with the stakeholders. Stakeholders know that caseworkers will respond to them within a day or two. This could be either phone, email or text message. They also appreciate the fact that if case workers are going to be gone for longer periods of time they receive the “out of office” email.
2. It has been reported that the caseworkers are doing strong work and truly care about the children in Johnson County. “These caseworkers will go out of their way for the children and families of our community.”
3. Workers are a little more limited with Johnson County being a smaller community so they do outreach to the resources in Sheridan County. The workers are using them to the up most advantage.
4. Caseworkers report that overall they are able to complete their face to faces visits on a monthly basis including the out of state contacts.
5. Johnson County has a strong CPT team that meets monthly and are committed to the welfare of the children. They have a team of 20 people including law enforcement and county attorneys.
6. This office has been cross trained however the office primarily operates in specialty areas. The cross training offers the opportunity for case workers to assist each other as necessary which has increased staff rapport and morale.
7. Children under the age of six who have gone into placement are being referred to the Child Development Centers for the mandatory screenings. Case workers are letting the foster parents do this at their convenience but do make sure that they are being done within the first 30 days of being in the foster home. The case workers would prefer sooner than 30 days if it is possible.
8. The new county attorney recognizes there were problems in the past with his office and is striving to make a difference in supporting DFS in whatever ways he can.
9. The foster parents have a support group twice a month which allows them to connect with each other and also offers opportunities for training hours.
10. Foster parents feel appreciated and valued by the foster parent coordinator and by the stakeholders in the community. Foster parents comment that their motivation for becoming a foster parent is the ability to help a child in need.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

1. Johnson County is experiencing a lack of foster families. This has a potential to increase re-entry and decrease the likelihood of long term permanency.
2. Signs of Safety is being partially implemented at this time. They are using some of the tools to facilitate their work with families and feel it has the potential to be an asset in case planning.
3. It was reported that transitioning youth are having difficulty acquiring the skills needs to independent living prior to leaving protective custody. Some of the areas which are reported to be lacking are transitions for continuation of mental health services and skills for financial independence.
4. The local office is familiar with the Drug Endangered Children program as they have participated in webinars hosted by the National DEC office.
5. There is concern that as positions are vacated, they will not be filled which would create a burden by increasing caseload size.
6. There is a lack of mental health services in the area, particularly those related to assisting individuals who are suicidal. Children have to be transported to either Casper or Gillette. This can be too hard on the child and family.
7. Foster parents expressed that identification of resources and more indepth information about working with children who have multiple issues would be beneficial during the initial training.
8. The loss of the group home in Johnson County has negatively impacted services for children and families. “Now that it is gone it is appreciated more than it was before.”
9. This is a lack of resources related to identification and treatment of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the local area.
10. Foster parents expressed a concern that often times children do not have enough of an “adjustment time” when entering a new foster home before demands are but on both the child and the foster family. This is related to establishing a routine and schedule related to current family expectations and new expectations which involved the child.

**Recommendation (local and state)**

1. Provide update training for WYCAPS .
2. Further training with law enforcement and staff regarding procedures for drug endangered children. It would be beneficial to strengthen the relationship with DFS and law enforcement by implementing a consistent practice and also creating a deeper understanding of roles of each organization related to child welfare.
3. The county would benefit from community discussions around the need for revitalizing a group home here.
4. A statewide foster parent recruitment effort would be beneficial to have options for placement, especially for older youth and children with disabilities. The older youth are the ones that are having the most trouble placing and keeping in a stable foster home.
5. It was suggested that during foster parent training it would be beneficial to set up a mock court hearing or mock MDT for foster parents to gain a full understanding of the process prior to entering into the situation
6. Foster parents would like more targeted trainings based on their needs related to the children that are being placed in care. Some of the suggested topics are how to develop skills to support children who are sexual assault victims as this area has seen an increase in child sexual assault cases.
7. Foster parents would like to have the opportunity to utilize other resources for respite outside of the DFS foster care system so it would be beneficial to investigate other options to support respite services.
8. Johnson County would benefit from discussions about how to acquire a forensic interview facility. Currently if they can do some of the questioning it is done in the office of the police department. If this not suitable enough for the case then they have to travel to Casper.

**Summary:**

Johnson County is working together to improve the lives of children and families. It is beneficial that the Buffalo has adequate resources to meet most of the needs of families, if they can’t find it in Buffalo they typically can find the resource in Sheridan. Wyoming is a rural state which makes it necessary to utilize some resources out of the area to meet the needs of children and families. This office strives on outstanding communication with the stake holders in the community and within the office itself. The caseworkers in this office have been recognized as great caseworkers and handle the case in best interest of the child.