**Platte County Department of Family Services Review**

Date of Review: November 17, 2014

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

Total Interviews:

DFS Staff – 6

Community Stakeholders – 6

Foster Parent Focus Group-3

**Goshen County Demographics**:

* As of 2013 the population for Goshen County was 8,765.
* There are five primary towns in Platte County; Wheatland, Guernsey, Glendo, Chugwater, and Hartville.
* In Platte County 11.70% of the population lives below the poverty line.
* There is no homeless shelter in Goshen County.
* There is no crisis shelter in Goshen County.

**Strengths:**

1. Platte County has a team that works well together and through the cross training model is able to support each other’s case work which benefits families for consistency and also assists with the on call schedule. There has been some recent turn over in the office however as new workers are brought on staff the expectation of cross training is embraced.
2. Children who are taken into protective custody under the age of five (not currently enrolled in the public school system) are reported to be receiving a developmental evaluation through the local child development/Head Start center within 30 days.
3. The local Public Health Nurse is a resource for developmental and parenting support. The Public Health Nurse offers home visitation to families to assist with reunification or prevention efforts as able.
4. The Signs of Safety training is slowly being introduced. It has been beneficial to implement the program as they are learning the information.
5. The foster care coordinator for this region is supportive of foster parents and local case workers to ensure that foster parents have adequate resources to support the children who are placed in their homes.
6. Foster parents expressed feeling supported by the caseworkers and included in meetings.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

1. There is a lack of foster homes in Platte County, especially for older youth. This has a potential to increase re-entry and decrease the likelihood of long term permanency.
2. There is a lack of knowledge on how to utilize the WYCAPS system. The WYCAPS system is directly linked to the word processing system so there is difficulty completing narratives if the WYCAPS system is down. This causes loss of productive work hours as well as creates difficulties with meeting deadlines.
3. It is reported that there is a gap in understanding of primary roles related to child welfare particularly related to law enforcement. Foster parents also express difficulties with understanding of roles for themselves, biological parents, the child welfare agency and the court system.
4. Foster parents report that online training is beneficial due to time commitments but it is not useful for an in depth understanding. It makes it difficult to participate in training primarily on line as there is no available resource to answer questions immediately as the training is occurring.
5. Due to a recent change at the state office, there is limited opportunity for the local offices to reply to complaints directly with the family due to state intervention. Local offices are not being provided the opportunity to resolve the issue with the family prior to it going to the state office. This is concerning because it impacts the established chain of command.
6. It is reported that there has been an increase in substance abuse activity in Guernsey. It is reported that there is no officer staffed to work from 12:00am to 6:00am most nights which then makes it difficult to control substance abuse activities.
7. There has been an increase in marijuana use and traffic through Platte County which may be a result of the legalization of use in Colorado.
8. A new County Attorney has been elected in Platte County which will take effect in January of 2015. This relationship will need to be fostered to ensure that both agencies have an understanding of expectations moving forward.
9. It was discovered through the review process that there is inconsistencies with visitation of children whose parents are under the influence at the time of the visit. There is inconsistencies across the child welfare agencies as well as through the court system.
10. Foster parents report that they are invited to attend meetings on behave of the children but that often their voice is not “heard” or respected in the process.

**Recommendation (local and state)**

1. It is recommended that there be ongoing training for WYCAPS especially when updates are made. Some specific areas of interest are related to timelines and alerts. It is also difficult to enter casework notes when WYCAPS is down. There has been a significant amount of “down” time for as caseworkers are unable to word process if the WYCAPS system is down. Recommend investigating other word processing options for field workers so that time and information is not lost when WYCAPS is down.
2. It is difficult to complete data entry and reporting due to computer malfunctions. It would be beneficial to investigate improved computer systems. It is also difficult to complete narratives when the WYCAPS system is down because word is directly linked to this system. Investigate other alternatives to decrease loss of productive work hours related to computer issues.
3. It is recommended that the community continue to investigate the opportunities that the Drug Endangered Children program offers. Wyoming Citizen Review Panel can act as a liaison to open communication between the child protection agency and law enforcement to facilitate the process.
4. It would be beneficial to offer I pads or dictation pens for the on call staff to use.
5. It is recommended that the state office continue to work with the local offices and the foster care coordinators to ensure recruitment of foster homes.
6. It is recommended that the training for foster parents be evaluated for effectiveness and offer all of the same opportunities for training to foster families and kinship placements.
7. Foster parents need more information about role delineation for children and families in their care. It would be beneficial to establish expectations at time of enrolling as a foster parent.
8. It is recommended that the state office establish a team to address policy/procedure considerations related to parents who are under the influence during visitation. It is essential that there is a standard of practice to ensure that children and families are receiving the services to best meet their needs while ensuring that children are safe and moving towards permanency. This team should include representation from the child welfare agency, behavioral health and the court system to ensure that this is a team approach to a systemic issue.

**Summary:**

Platte County is focused on providing quality services to children and families. Although this office has some new staff, it appears that they are committed to providing the best services to children and families through the cross training model to assist with consistency. This review brought to light the issue of establishing a standard of practice across the state to ensure families with substance abuse issues are being addressed in the same manner. This office is working hard to ensure that families and community partners are connected to the available resources both in the community when possible and outside if necessary. Platte County has a sound foundation to build upon for the betterment of children and families and would benefit from continued coordinated efforts to further improve services. Foster parents were able to come together during this review to share their perspective of the child welfare system. This opportunity presented information that can assist the state in creating a system that supports the efforts of the foster parents and provides an opportunity to ensure that their training and expectations are obvious from the beginning. Overall Platte County is making efforts to ensure that children and families are successful by offering quality services that impact the future.