

Nebraska Foster Care Review Board

2006 Annual Report and Recommendations Summary for the Judicial Branch

“The Nebraska Supreme Court continues to be committed to improving our court system as it pertains to the welfare of Nebraska’s children. Over the last year, all courts with juvenile jurisdiction have created ‘Through the Eyes of the Child’ committees to implement best practices for abuse and neglect cases. I want to thank all the participants in the ‘Through the Eyes of the Child’ initiative for the hard work they have done in the past year. I want to especially thank the Foster Care Review Board for its participation in the Initiative. I look forward to working with all the interested parties on the ‘Through the Eyes of the Child’ initiative in the future.”

– Chief Justice Mike Heavican



From the Executive Director ...



**Carolyn K. Stitt,
Executive Director**

2006 was a remarkable year.

Just look at these statistics:

1) **Decrease of 1,047 children** in foster care at the close of 2006. This is a huge step in the right direction – 16.4% fewer children in foster care.

2) **Fewer children returned to foster care** – At the close of 2006, 38% of the children had been in foster care before, compared to 46% of the children at the end of 2005.

3) **More children were adopted** during 2006. An increase of 21.9% as reflected in the 423 children adopted in 2006.

There has been an exciting coalescence of all branches of Nebraska government – Executive, Legislative and Judicial – focusing on concerns for children in foster care. Following ground-breaking initiatives spearheaded by Governor Dave Heineman and Chief Justice Mike Heavican, everyone is pulling together at unprecedented levels of cooperation. I personally want to thank everyone involved in this dramatic direction and effort.

However, the following sobering statistics clearly show that there is more work still to be done. We would like to bring to your attention these two areas of concern:

1) 1,298 of those children had been in foster care for two years or more.

2) 67.4% of guardians ad litem did not respond to Board requests for case information. During the review process, the Board issued requests for 5,079 cases. Only 1,657 guardian ad litem responses were logged.

This summary of the annual report of the Foster Care Review Board is dedicated to the Nebraska Judiciary. Chief Justice Heavican's initiative – *Through the Eyes of the Child* – has directed the focus on children from birth to age five with the aim of attaining timely permanency for this very vulnerable age group. The Foster Care Review Board endorses this initiative, which helps to move cases more effectively through the court system by concentrating on the following:

Pre-hearing Conferences. These conferences address the reasons why a child enters into foster care at the beginning, work with integral parties to determine ways to re-direct the child's home environment, initiate a plan of action for compliance, and monitor an early return of the child to his or her home. Effective use of Pre-hearing Conferences at the initial or protective custody hearing phase of the case can produce positive gains prior to adjudication.

Aggravated Circumstances Hearings. There are certain cases where the nature of the abuse or neglect is so severe or so repetitive that reunification with the child's parents jeop-

ardizes and compromises the child's safety and well-being, and exposes the child to an unreasonable risk of being re-abused. In cases where such aggravated circumstances exist, the system needs improvement in identifying these cases up front and in fast tracking permanency for these children as allowed by Nebraska law. This means that prosecutors must ask the court to make a finding that the State is excused from its duty to make efforts to reunify these children with their abusive parents. Children can then be moved more quickly into permanency, whether in the form of adoption or guardianship.

12-month Permanency Hearings. These are required by law to occur in all cases and must focus on appropriate permanency in order that children can move out of the foster care system. Keeping a child in foster care is not risk-free. Nebraska's children remain in foster care far too long (see statistics for individual counties on pages 10 and 11). Permanency hearings need to occur in order to reduce the time that children spend in the foster care system.

Filing criminal charges or pursuing termination of parental rights where appropriate. When a child suffers extreme abuse or severe neglect, county attorneys play an essential role in holding perpetrators criminally responsible for the physical and psychological injuries and deprivations sustained by the child. Petitions to terminate parental rights may be filed immediately in cases where efforts to reunify the family are not required. Otherwise, termination proceedings should be filed on a timely basis as mandated by Nebraska law or the facts of the case.

Assuring quality guardian ad litem representation of foster children. The Board applauds the Nebraska Supreme Court's adoption of specific practice guidelines to help guardians ad litem improve their representation of children in juvenile court proceedings. However, too often local review board volunteers still hear complaints from foster parents and children that they have had no contact from the child's guardian ad litem. By law, guardians ad litem are required to interview the children's foster care provider, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) caseworker. Adequate legal representation and vigilant advocacy of the child's best interests are vital in order to assure the child's safety and permanency.

We are grateful for the support and leadership of the Supreme Court and appreciate the words of Chief Justice Heavican, who wrote in his statement: *"The Nebraska Supreme Court continues to be committed to improving our court system as it pertains to the welfare of Nebraska's children."*

We have made substantial, real progress in addressing the needs of Nebraska's children in foster care; we look forward to continuing this progress next year and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn K. Stitt". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Fall 2006 special study analyzes Nebraska's foster care children birth to age five.



Research on the physical and emotional development of children birth to age five years demonstrates how especially critical it is that those children have stability and continuity of care.

According to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, the brains of children at birth have literally billions of neurons, with unlimited potential just waiting for connections to be made with other neurons, thereby creating mental abilities and future skills and aptitudes. "This vital process of connectivity does not 'just happen' as a child grows older. In fact, the environment of the child is crucial to the success of this development. There must be a steady supply of attention, interaction and cuddling with the infant in order to promote connections between neurons."¹

In their research, Drs. T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan identified specific needs of children, needs which must be met in order for them to develop the higher-level emotional, social and actual abilities necessary for those children to grow into effective and responsible adults and parents. They issued the challenge that meeting these specific needs should be our highest priority:

- 1) **Ongoing nurturing relationships.**
- 2) **Physical protection, safety, and regulation.**
- 3) **Experiences tailored to individual differences.**
- 4) **Developmentally appropriate experiences.**
- 5) **Setting limits, structure, and expectations.**
- 6) **Stable, supportive communities and culture.**
- 7) **Protection for the future.**²

Others, such as the Judicial Commission on Zero to Three, have recognized these specific needs as well.

"The importance of positive early environments and stable relationships for a child's healthy development is incontrovertible. At the same time, a lack of attention to infants in or at risk of foster care placement has long-term implications for those children in our society. Children who spend their early years in foster care are more likely than other children to leave school, become parents as teenagers, enter the juvenile system and become adults who are homeless, incarcerated and addicted to drugs. Answering the cry of infants in foster care is an investment in their lives and the future of all children."³

The Foster Care Review Board, in collaboration with DHHS and in response to the growing and critical concern for children birth to age five, conducted a special study of 948 children during the fall of 2006.

Here's what the study told us:

Why are children in foster care?

One major reason: substance abuse –

352 (37.1%) had been affected by parental *meth* abuse.

218 (23.0%) had been

affected by parental

alcohol abuse, and 124

(13.1%) had been affected

by parental *cocaine* abuse.

37.1% of the children were affected by **meth abuse** by their parents.

How many foster homes?

182 (19.2%) lived in four or more foster care placements, a level of instability

that many experts find

detrimental. Short-term

respite and hospitaliza-

tions were not counted.

19.2% of the children were affected by **4 or more** placement changes.

How many caseworkers?

342 (36.0%) had their cases managed by four or more

different caseworkers, not

counting intake workers,

or workers filling in at

court, or during another

caseworker's brief absence.

36.0% of the children were affected by **4 or more** different caseworkers.

No reports on visitation –

507 birth to age five children had parental visitation

supervised/monitored by contractors. For 147 of those

507 (29.0%), there were

no visitation reports in

their files indicating who

had supervised/monitored

those visitations. For those cases with visitation reports,

112 children had 5 to 15 different supervisors/monitors,

and 13 had over 20. This documentation is critical for

determining court-ordered parental compliance and

timely decision-making of a child's case. Lack of docu-

mentation can lead to a waste of taxpayer dollars.

29.0% of children's cases had **no visitation reports** in their case files.

How long in foster care?

166 (17.5%) had been in foster care for two years or

longer. From the point of

view of a child birth to age

five, 24 months is too long

in foster care.

17.5% of the children had spent **two years or more** in foster care.

¹ Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Early Brain Development, National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, October 2001.

² Brazelton, Dr. T. Berry & Greenspan, Stanley, as quoted in "Our Window to the Future," Newsweek Special Issue, Fall/Winter 2000.

³ Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates, and Child Welfare Professionals, Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, Zero to Three Policy Center, January 2004.

37.1% of children studied during the last quarter of 2006 (352 of 948) had come into care in part due to parental methamphetamine abuse.



Methamphetamine is a highly addictive substance, an addiction which is a particularly difficult struggle to overcome. The rate of relapse, which occurs at alarming rates for all substance abuse victims, is strikingly high for meth addicts. The effects of meth abuse are devastating: damaging one's brain cells, and eventually leading to disfigurement, incapacity and even death. Citizen volunteers on Foster Care Local Review Boards

have reviewed cases which centered around a parent who manufactures ("cooks") meth in his or her home. Even if the mixture, which is highly volatile, does not explode, the fumes given off by the process permeate everything – carpets, furniture, draperies, wall coverings – along with children's clothes, hair, eyes and lungs.

Local review board members have seen many heart-wrenching cases where a child's biological mother ingested meth throughout the pregnancy, some as little as four days before giving birth. These children are often taken into foster care immediately at birth and placed in foster homes. The positive impact of early childhood intervention and placement with a loving foster family on the development of the children is amazing.

A growing concern affecting the health, safety and welfare of children is the increase in the instances of substance abuse by parents. The Honorable John P. Icenogle summarized the problem quite clearly:

"Children in a methamphetamine home are victimized by the very environment in which they live. They are often victims of, or witnesses to, significant domestic violence and physical abuse. ... The children are exposed to both an alcohol and drug culture as friends of the users come and go. These children tend to isolate themselves from other children, and are characterized by high truancy rates from school. When identified, 'meth' homes are not quickly fixed.

*Mothers who are required to choose between reunification with their children or continued methamphetamine usage all too often choose their drug rather than their children."*¹

Case Example:

"Henry," now age 7, and "Sam," now age 5, first entered foster care over three years ago due to serious neglect of Henry's medical needs, domestic violence, a dirty home, and the mother's use of methamphetamine. DHHS offered chemical dependency services to the mother, who had been unsuccessful in treatment on three prior occasions prior to the birth of these children. By that time, the mother had been the subject of child abuse and neglect reports due to her drug use for at least five years. The children remained in foster care for about six months and then were placed back with their mother.

Henry and Sam lived with their mother at a treatment center for about seven months, when the mother was asked to leave the center due to conflicts. A few months later, the mother's third child, "Mark," tested positive for methamphetamine at birth. All the children were removed from her care.

Currently, the mother is in another treatment program. She has recently had her fourth child, who was made a ward of the state, but who lives with his mother at the treatment program. The plan continues to be reunification for all the children.

¹ Honorable John P. Icenogle before the Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform, Hearing on Combating Methamphetamines through Prevention and Education, Nov. 17, 2005.

"The decisions in child welfare are not between good and bad. They are between worse and least worse. Each decision will be harmful. What decision will do the least amount of damage?"

We all have a tendency to underrate the risk to the child of being in the foster care system and overrate the risk to the child of living in poverty in a dysfunctional family."

– Dr. Ann Coyne,
University of Nebraska Omaha, School of Social Work

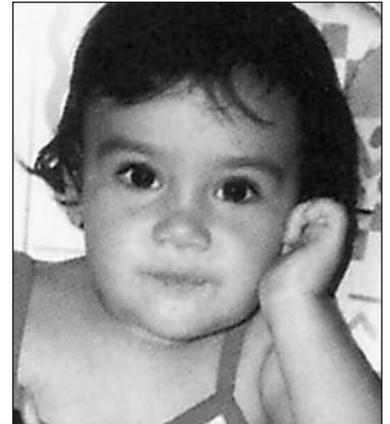
The Board's primary recommendation continues to be focusing on vulnerable children birth to age five.

Rationale: Increased focus upon stabilizing the cases of children birth to age five could provide an effective and long-term solution to the number of young children who are placed in foster care while simultaneously protecting the group most vulnerable.

The first five years of a child's life are crucial for successful and healthy development. Birth to age five children who are neglected or abused can suffer permanent brain damage. As these children age, and become parents themselves, the odds increase that they will rear children who will enter the foster care system. As we acknowledge this fact, our focus and direction should become clear: we must do now what is best for children at birth to age five who have been identified as the vic-

tims of neglect and/or abuse in order to positively impact their future.

The Board continues requesting that children birth to age five be given the strongest representation in the system from judges, to guardians ad litem, to county attorneys, in order to assure safe and appropriate permanency is achieved for these children.



Second: The Board urges active involvement at all levels to achieve the goals established by the Nebraska Supreme Court's initiative *Through the Eyes of the Child*.

The Nebraska Supreme Court's Children's Summit was held September 25-27, 2006, in Nebraska City. This message rang loud and clear: "View the court and foster care system through the eyes of children."

As reported in the December 2006 issue of Nebraska Judicial News, Sarpy County Separate Juvenile Court Judge Lawrence Gendler is chairing the new *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative. The state is organized in 25 community-based teams, led by a local judge. Other team members include county attorneys, guardians ad litem, DHHS representatives, CASA volunteers, attorneys representing parents, and members of the Foster Care Review Board. According to Gendler, the



Judge Lawrence Gendler

teams will work locally to implement best practices for children in the court system.

Among the goals Gendler has set for the Initiative, he intends to standardize court order forms, incorporating new laws and regulations, particularly those included in the Safe Family Act. These forms will help the court determine where they are in their timelines toward permanency.

Gendler indicates that he is encouraged by the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative. Reflecting back on the summit that created it, he commented that "*(Everyone) committed to do something – important for the system. A rare thing.*"

"(Everyone) committed to do something – important for the system. A rare thing."

– Judge Lawrence Gendler

Third: Strengthen the front end of the child welfare system through the use of Pre-hearing Conferences.

The front-end of the child welfare system must be strengthened to assure that the only children removed from their home are those whose circumstances make it absolutely necessary for their health and safety. Likewise, measures must be taken from the beginning of the case to ensure that children who have been removed are safe while in foster care, that their essential needs are met, and that they leave foster care to safe, permanent homes as soon as possible.

Pre-hearing Conferences are an effective way to move children towards permanency. The Pre-hearing Conference is an informal meeting where all parties involved in the case, including the parents, get together for the purpose of gaining the cooperation of the parents and develop a problem-solving atmosphere. These Conferences can be scheduled within 30 days of the child

entering out of home care, shortening the time in which critical decisions are made and allowing the family to receive needed services immediately to address the reasons that the child entered care. This is critical, as studies show that a parent is more motivated to work towards reunification and address the reasons their child entered care within the first six weeks after their child is removed.

At the Pre-hearing Conference, the parties involved may:

- Address any issues of paternity.
- Assure ICWA is followed, if applicable.
- Identify relatives and explore the feasibility of a relative placement.
- Determine the child's out of home placement.
- Identify and set-up services for the parents and children.
- Schedule visitation.

Judge Kenneth Vampola, Dodge County Court, reduces the number of children in care by 50% with effective use of Pre-hearing Conferences.

I was surprised and very pleased when I found out about the significant decrease in the number of foster care children in Dodge County over the last two years. In my opinion, this decrease results from attitude and policy changes by the stakeholders involved in the juvenile justice system, which in turn have been implemented in Dodge County. The most significant changes are the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative through the Nebraska Supreme Court and the Department of Health and Human Services risk and safety assessment policy revisions.

Dodge County formed its local team immediately after the October 2006 Nebraska City Summit to implement "best practices" advocated by the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative. The first Pre-hearing Conference was held on November 30, 2006, and as of October 31, 2007, thirty-seven Pre-hearing Conferences have been facilitated. According to our court records, one-third of these cases were dismissed, settled, or adjudicated at the first appearance before the juvenile court. Many of the children are being returned home with a safety plan in place before the first appearance. Subsequently, the reduc-



Judge
Kenneth Vampola

tion of cases requiring an adjudication hearing has reduced the time required for disposition to approximately 60 to 90 days from the time of removal. Prior to the implementation of Pre-hearing Conferences, children often remained in foster care for six weeks pending the parents' first appearance and entry of plea before the court.

The *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative has completely changed my perspective as a juvenile court judge. I have become much more aware of the passage of time and the expedited calendaring of juvenile court proceedings.

Finally, I must give credit to the Dodge County Bar and the Dodge County Attorney's office for their support of best practices and a spirit of professional cooperation in the best interest of the children. My gratitude also goes to the other members of the Dodge County Team: Benita Steffes, DHHS Administrator; Jeri L. Grachek, Deputy Co. Attorney; Kelly Henry Turner, Guardian ad Litem; Pamela Lynn Hopkins, Parent's Attorney; Dawn M. Peters, CASA; Marcia Fouraker, member of Fremont's local Foster Care Review Board; and Cyndy Koerber, Fremont Area Mediation.

Fourth: Assure that decisions that are critical to the child's permanency are made at the court's mandatory 12-month Permanency Hearings.

As required by law, the 12-month Permanency Hearing represents a pivotal point in each child's case, at which the court should determine whether the pursuit of reunification remains a viable option, or whether alternative permanency for the child should be pursued.

Delays in the case can increase the probability that the child will experience more transitions to different placements, resulting in the possibility of more negative consequences for the child. Monitoring parental compliance with court orders, ascertainment of paternity, and complete searches to identify relatives of the child all are needed to achieve a successful 12-month Permanency Hearing.

The Board found that, during the last half of 2006, paternity had not been established for 19.2% of the

reviewed children's cases. This level is an improvement over the 22.5% level in 2005.

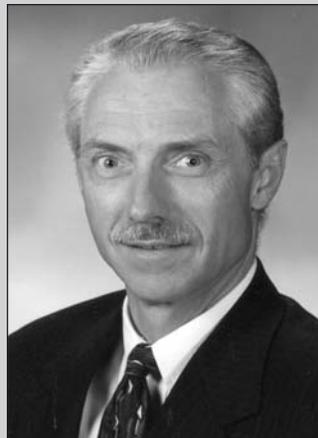
Failure to identify or ascertain the issue of the child's paternity creates two major problems for the child: 1) an inability to assess the suitability of the father or any of his relatives as a prospective custodian of the child, and 2) the child will not be free for adoption as long as a father's parental rights remain unaddressed. Both of these problems can result in a delay in permanency for the child consisting of several months or longer.



Judge G. Glenn Camerer, Scotts Bluff County and Juvenile Court, achieves success through effective 12-month Permanency Hearings.

In the 12th Judicial District, the panhandle of Nebraska, we are very pleased with the implementation of new procedures proposed in the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative. Our experiences have shown that parents of children named in an abuse or neglect petition are more involved from the outset of the case. Involving the parents and making sure their voice is heard reduces the adversarial nature of the case in many instances. Parents express their opinions on visitation issues and foster care or relative placement issues. We make an effort to inform and involve the parents by using a facilitator prior to court sessions who meet with the parents in a less stressful environment. This helps to de-mystify the court proceedings for the parents so they can participate in a meaningful way.

As a judge, I have modified some of my choice of words in court to minimize use of legal terms. I always try to address the parents in language they will understand so they will not be too intimidated to speak.



Judge
G. Glenn Camerer

We emphasize that the court's goal is to reunite families whenever possible.

Guardians ad litem are appointed at the onset of the case for the children. Occasionally a guardian ad litem is also necessary for an incompetent or absent parent. Safety nets for the children are discussed with input from the Department of Health and Human Services and all other parties to the case. Initially, hearings are held weekly to monitor the status of the case and ensure necessary services are in place for the parents and the children.

These methods result in services to the family much earlier in the proceedings. Our goal is timely reunification of families with an adequate safety net and necessary services in place. If reunification is not possible, then permanency for the children in other appropriate homes is pursued as a goal earlier in the proceedings. We believe that should reduce the duration of foster care and also achieve permanency for the children in other homes when necessary.

Finally, the Board recommends increased accountability for guardians ad litem to assure that they are providing involved, informed representation and effective advocacy for children.

Rationale: An informed, involved guardian ad litem is the best advocate for the child’s legal rights and best interests. The guardian ad litem is charged with a legal duty of assuring that the best interests and the legal rights of the child are effectively represented and protected in juvenile court proceedings.

Local board members reviewing cases and making Project Permanency foster home visits hear the complaints all too often: “I don’t know who my guardian ad litem is; I didn’t know we had one. What is a guardian ad litem?”

Judges need to hold guardians ad litem accountable for their duties in connection with the children whom they represent. Guardians ad litem are required to submit reports that are independent of those submitted by the other participants in the case, and that represents the independent judgment and recommendations of the guardian ad litem regarding the child’s placement and any other issue affecting the child’s best interests. Judges should ensure that their guardians ad litem have actually visited the children whom they are appointed to represent. Due to age or physical/mental condition, children birth to age five are most vulnerable to abuse and neglect and often cannot speak for themselves.

In response to this concern of sometimes checkered and inadequate legal representation for children, Judge G. Glen Camerer, County Judge with the 12th Judicial District in Scotts Bluff County, crafted the following proposal to help assure quality representation of children in foster care:

New proposals for guardians ad litem

The purpose of this process is to:

- 1) Identify the court’s expectations regarding guardian ad litem performance.
- 2) Identify the parameters of the reports required of the guardian ad litem.
- 3) Give the judge information needed to verify if the guardian ad litem billing for each case is reasonable.

This new procedure has three parts:

- 1) Upon appointment, guardians ad litem should consider their job description equivalent to that identified in §43-272 (2)(b) which states, “... a guardian ad litem shall have the duty to protect the interests of the juvenile for whom he or she has been appointed guardian, and shall be deemed a parent of the juvenile as to those proceedings with respect to which his or her guardianship extends.”

The job description will include all pertinent statutory references and will describe the expectation that independent judgment will be exercised by the guardian ad litem in verifying that the child’s needs are being met. The guardian ad litem will be an attorney who is charged with protecting the best interests and legal interests of the juvenile in question.

It will be the guardian ad litem’s duty to submit written reports. Guardians ad litem are required to consult with the juvenile within two weeks of appointment and at least once every six months thereafter. Guardians ad litem are required to interview foster parents or other custodians, and current DHHS case-workers, and should interview others involved in the case such as parents, teachers, physicians, etc. Guardians ad litem are required to attend hearings for the child, and have a right to access records, reports, and information.

- 2) At the time of appointment, guardians ad litem will also receive a list of the items that will need to be completed and included in the guardian ad litem report for the dispositional hearing and dispositional review.

The detailed report will include a list of which individuals, in which capacities, the guardian ad litem consulted in order to form his or her independent recommendations regarding the child(ren) in question, how often they saw the child(ren), and how often they consulted with whom.

- 3) Prior to the payment of an invoice for guardian ad litem services, the billing will be reviewed by the judge, the clerk magistrate, or by a staff person designated by the judge. Bills for services must correspond to the work accomplished on behalf of the child(ren). Failure to provide sufficient consultations will be addressed by the judge.

In larger jurisdictions the judge may have the clerk or other staff person look at the billing. Judges may also want to review a sample of one out of ten billings received.

In order to facilitate the processing of billings, the judge may want to have a short checklist inside the case file cover to log guardian ad litem involvement in the case.

The Board acknowledges and thanks the 30.2% (1,657 of the 5,079) of the guardians ad litem who responded to the Review Board’s request for information.

Major Board activities during 2006 ...

Reviewing children's cases ...

- **5,473 reviews of 3,728 children's plans**

The Foster Care Review Board conducted 5,473 reviews in 2006, **an increase of 493 reviews over last year – almost 10%**. The Foster Care Review Board is the IV-E review agency for the state (each child is reviewed every six months).

- **38,311 case specific reports**

This represents **an increase of 3,631 (+10.5%)** over 2005. These reports, each with recommendations were issued by the Board to the courts, agencies, attorneys, guardians ad litem, county attorneys, and other legal parties.

Reviewing a child's case includes:

- The Foster Care Review Board staff reviews DHHS case files, gathers additional pertinent information regarding the child's welfare, provides information to local board members prior to local board meetings, and provides the means for pertinent parties to participate in the local board meetings.
- Local board members make recommendations and findings on the placement, services, and plan; remaining barriers to achieving the permanency objective are identified, and a comprehensive recommendation report is issued to all legal parties to the child's case.
- Caseworkers, guardians ad litem, and others have been increasingly open to input from our review specialists and members of local review boards.

Promoting the best interests of children during 2006 ...

- **350 Project Permanency visits**

Volunteer members of local review boards visited 350 homes of young children, birth through age five, to assure safety and to provide additional information to the foster parents.

- **Attended 1,098 court hearings**

The Foster Care Review Board staff and local board members attended court for cases of concern 1,098 times in 2006. The total last year was 639 – **an increase of 459 (+71.8%)**.

- **Board staff tracked 10,972 children**

The Board's staff accomplished this work **while simultaneously converting computer systems**.

- **Board provided data to the judiciary**

Since the implementation of the Supreme

Court's *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative, the Board's staff provided statistics to the 10 separate Juvenile Court Judges and the 36 County Court Judges who serve as Juvenile Judges, and also provided lists of children in care for 10 months to assure the 12-month Permanency Hearings were scheduled.

Promoting the best interests of children in foster care includes:

- Pro-actively working with the courts when, during a child's review, one or more of the following case concerns are identified:
 1. The board strongly disagrees with the permanency plan.
 2. The child's placement is unsafe or inappropriate.
 3. The child has been restrained multiple times.
 4. The visitation arrangements are not in the child's best interest.
 5. Services are not in place for the child.
- Staffing cases and/or contacting DHHS caseworkers, supervisors, legal staff, adoption workers, or administration as well as guardians ad litem, investigators, or prosecutors on behalf of an individual child's case to help implement solutions to the local review board's case concerns.



Visiting foster care facilities...

In accordance with the Board's authority under Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1303(3), the Board visited facilities in 2006 to help assure that children's health and safety needs were being met.

Visiting foster care facilities includes visiting foster homes, group homes and detention facilities to assure that the individual physical, psychological, and sociological needs of the children are being met. Project Permanency visits to foster homes of birth to age five children allowed trained local board members to assure the safety of the children and to provide additional information to the foster parents.

The information obtained and reported by the Board to the court as a result of these visits can assist the court at review hearings, where the court is required to determine whether the individual physical, psychological, and sociological needs of the children are being met.

Statistics on children in foster care...

	Total Number of Children in Care	Children in care for two years or more	Removed from the home more than once	4 or more case workers	Age				Adjudication Status			Children placed in same county as parent	Number of Placements		
					Birth to 5	6 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 18	Abuse/Neglect	Status Offender	Other		1 to 3	4 to 6	7 or More
ADAMS	101	29	43	48	24	9	6	62	49	15	37	40	45	22	34
ANTELOPE	6	2	4	3	1	0	0	5	2	1	3	1	1	3	2
ARTHUR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BANNER	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BLAINE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BOONE	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	3	0	1	4	0
BOX BUTTE	20	9	11	11	3	3	1	13	12	1	7	7	10	5	5
BOYD	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	3	1	1	3	0
BROWN	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
BUFFALO	69	16	33	30	15	8	11	35	36	7	26	29	27	21	21
BURT	10	4	4	2	2	3	1	4	7	0	3	7	6	3	1
BUTLER	30	6	7	7	13	2	6	9	25	1	4	13	20	5	5
CASS	37	4	23	6	6	8	6	17	26	3	8	14	11	6	20
CEDAR	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
CHASE	6	0	2	1	1	0	3	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	1
CHERRY	4	0	2	2	1	0	0	3	2	1	1	0	2	1	1
CHEYENNE	25	6	6	8	7	2	4	12	17	1	7	12	14	5	6
CLAY	8	0	2	2	2	1	2	3	5	0	3	0	6	2	0
COLFAX	10	0	6	2	2	0	1	7	5	1	4	2	5	2	3
CUMING	7	0	2	4	2	1	0	4	5	1	1	2	4	2	1
CUSTER	16	10	8	14	1	2	4	9	9	2	5	4	4	6	6
DAKOTA	64	10	20	19	18	7	9	30	36	0	28	29	30	21	13
DAWES	8	2	5	4	1	0	0	7	1	0	7	0	3	1	4
DAWSON	59	12	28	14	23	3	1	32	32	4	23	19	29	11	19
DEUEL	3	1	2	2	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	2
DIXON	12	4	2	5	2	1	1	8	7	0	5	2	7	1	4
DODGE	106	29	54	44	20	10	18	58	64	5	37	28	41	20	45
DOUGLAS	1,926	567	710	1,057	546	219	231	930	1,357	93	476	1,222	809	503	614
DUNDY	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
FILLMORE	15	5	3	1	4	1	2	8	14	1	0	5	8	4	3
FRANKLIN	8	3	5	2	0	0	1	7	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
FRONTIER	3	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	1
FURNAS	11	3	4	5	1	0	2	8	4	4	3	1	4	3	4
GAGE	55	6	18	14	14	10	8	23	36	7	12	20	25	19	11
GARDEN	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
GARFIELD	3	0	3	2	0	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	2	1	0
GOSPER	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
GRANT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GREELEY	5	2	2	4	1	1	1	2	4	0	1	1	1	2	2
HALL	154	26	57	58	59	9	17	69	105	7	42	64	82	23	49
HAMILTON	11	0	4	5	0	1	3	7	3	4	4	2	5	2	4
HARLAN	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
HAYES	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
HITCHCOCK	5	0	4	4	1	1	0	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	2
HOLT	14	6	6	5	0	0	2	12	8	3	3	5	5	3	6
HOOKER	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
HOWARD	7	0	4	3	0	1	2	4	4	0	3	3	4	2	1
JEFFERSON	21	5	8	9	3	2	1	15	8	0	13	4	11	6	4

... by county, as of December 31, 2006

	Total Number of Children in Care	Children in care for two years or more	Removed from the home more than once	4 or more case workers	Age				Adjudication Status			Children placed in same county as parent	Number of Placements		
					Birth to 5	6 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 18	Abuse/Neglect	Status Offender	Other		1 to 3	4 to 6	7 or More
JOHNSON	9	5	1	8	2	0	2	5	6	0	3	0	3	2	4
KEARNEY	8	1	3	3	2	2	0	4	6	1	1	0	5	0	3
KEITH	12	0	7	1	1	2	0	9	6	1	5	1	3	5	4
KEYA PAHA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KIMBALL	19	13	4	9	6	2	3	8	15	2	2	5	6	7	6
KNOX	3	2	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
LANCASTER	1,057	242	389	616	295	124	136	502	738	23	296	589	478	270	309
LINCOLN	170	32	71	78	28	17	28	97	85	37	48	79	79	29	62
LOGAN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LOUP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MADISON	113	25	48	43	33	17	13	50	71	4	38	33	32	44	37
McPHERSON	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MERRICK	16	1	7	6	3	2	1	10	6	2	8	4	8	4	4
MORRILL	14	7	4	5	2	2	2	8	11	0	3	4	8	5	1
NANCE	6	0	3	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	6	1	3	2	1
NEMAHA	6	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	3	0
NUCKOLLS	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	2	0	1
OTOE	15	1	8	5	2	1	1	11	7	3	5	6	5	4	6
PAWNEE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PERKINS	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
PHELPS	28	1	15	13	5	3	1	19	13	5	10	8	14	2	12
PIERCE	11	4	1	5	3	1	0	7	9	1	1	3	9	1	1
PLATTE	59	14	16	17	14	4	10	31	36	5	18	10	34	10	15
POLK	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	1
RED WILLOW	31	2	12	8	4	2	2	23	9	7	15	5	13	7	11
RICHARDSON	13	2	10	6	1	0	2	10	8	1	4	5	4	7	2
ROCK	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
SALINE	28	4	13	10	8	2	2	16	22	0	6	4	11	11	6
SARPY	227	46	88	86	45	18	24	140	142	25	60	67	106	60	61
SAUNDERS	31	9	17	12	9	3	4	15	21	3	7	11	15	8	8
SCOTTS BLUFF	187	60	65	87	43	23	33	88	131	8	48	88	84	39	64
SEWARD	30	10	12	9	3	3	4	20	17	4	9	7	15	7	8
SHERIDAN	9	2	3	3	0	0	1	8	1	0	8	1	4	3	2
SHERMAN	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	4	1	0	4	5	0	0
SIOUX	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
STANTON	5	2	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	0	2	0	2	2	1
THAYER	11	1	2	2	1	0	0	10	5	0	6	0	7	1	3
THOMAS	3	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	1	0
THURSTON	23	5	12	5	5	3	2	13	13	2	8	9	8	4	11
VALLEY	11	4	4	5	1	2	2	6	9	1	1	1	5	3	3
WASHINGTON	23	7	8	9	2	1	3	17	12	2	9	2	12	4	7
WAYNE	6	1	0	1	4	0	0	2	6	0	0	5	5	1	0
WEBSTER	5	0	2	1	0	0	2	3	4	0	1	2	4	1	0
WHEELER	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YORK	43	7	15	12	16	2	1	24	26	1	16	13	23	13	7
Unreported	83	12	14	8	10	5	3	65	11	0	72	6	76	3	4
TOTALS:	5,186	1,298	1,961	2,484	1,333	548	633	2,672	3,368	312	1,506	2,522	2,330	1,286	1,569

Top Commendations and “Thank You” to:

Chief Justice Mike Heavican: for continuing the Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts. He is also commended for exploring ways to implement the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges recommendations to improve court practice in child abuse and neglect cases, and his continuation of the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative begun by his predecessor.

Juvenile and County Court Judges: for their leadership in the *Through the Eyes of the Child* teams, for their responsiveness to the issues identified by the Board and for their actions to monitor and, when necessary, expedite case progression as a means of helping to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner.

Judge Everett Inbody and Judge Douglas Johnson: for their co-chairmanship and leadership in the Commission on Children in the Courts which has taken affirmative steps designed to reduce the length of time for the processing of an appeal in cases involving the termination of parental rights, and has reviewed and made substantive practice recommendations regarding guardian ad litem representation.

Judge Lawrence Gendler: for his work coordinating the *Through the Eyes of the Child* initiative teams.

Foster Care Review Board Volunteers who serve on 48 local review boards: for their commitment and their donation of over 35,000 hours to Nebraska’s foster children.

Attorney General Jon Bruning: for his leadership and focus on children’s issues and for his continued support of the special unit in his office that prosecutes crimes against children. In particular we commend the work of Randy Stoll of that unit.

County Attorneys: for their many efforts to assure that Nebraska’s children are safe. In particular we commend the work of Robert Cashoili, Jennifer Chrystal-Clark, Stuart Dornan, Susanne Haas, Rebecca Harling, Kristin Huber, Sandra Markley, Amy Schuchman, Carrie Strovers, Eric Strovers, and Douglas Warner.

Gary Lacey, Lancaster County Attorney and Alicia Henderson, Chief Deputy County Attorney of Lancaster County’s Juvenile Unit: for reviewing all the Lancaster County DHHS intake reports, researching these cases and cross referencing the persons involved in the case with the Lincoln Police Department’s tracking computer, evaluating the child’s risk based on this additional information and determining and directing appropriate action on behalf of the children.

Guardians ad litem: for vigilantly advocating for a child’s best interest and for working to assure the child’s safety and permanency. In particular, we commend the work of Dorothy Benton, Claude Berreckman Jr., Jamie Birkel, Jane Burke, Michael Burns, Patrick Campagna, Chris Costantakos, Rachel Daugherty, Ann Ebsen, Stephanie Flodman, Paula Fritz, Robert Goodwin, Steve Guenzel, Tom Incontro, Monica Kruger, Laura Lowe, Jacqueline Madara-Campbell, John Milligan, Rex Moats, Candice Novak, Larry Ohs, Jason Ossian, John Sellers, Scott Sidwell, Roberta Stick, Mariclare Thomas, Rebecca Tvrdik, Jeffrey Wagner, and Steve Williams.

DHHS’ Legal Department: for working to facilitate appropriate permanency for foster children.

CASA Volunteers: for their time and dedication to the children and families they serve.

Foster Parents and Placements: for showing their concern and dedication by providing children the nurturing care and attention they need to overcome their past traumas.

Adoption Day Organizers and Volunteers in Omaha, Lincoln and Hastings: for working to make a very special day for foster children when they are adopted by their foster families.

Project Permanency Contributors – particularly Project Linus, Target, the Columbus Area United Way, Reruns R Fun, and local board members: for the monetary and in-kind donations. On behalf of the children, the Foster Care Review Board sincerely thanks each and every one of these contributors for their assistance in making Project Permanency a success.



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