

The Review

Special Interest Articles:

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Director, Kim Hawekotte

FCRO Advisory Committee Members:

Craig Timm
Chair, Omaha

Sandra Kruback
Co-Chair, North Platte

Michelle Hynes
Dakota City

Sheree Keely
Omaha

Elizabeth Neeley
Seward

Director Begins Journey with the FCRO

I've only been in the position of Director at the FCRO since January 22, 2013, but I wanted to reach out immediately to local board members to let each of you know you are appreciated. You are definitely valued members of our team. You give countless hours of your time to review the cases of children, and your recommendations and findings are crucial to the work we do. Thank you for all you do to advocate for children in out-of-home care in Nebraska.

In this newsletter, I'll give you a little insight into my professional background and update you on what we are involved in regarding child welfare and juvenile services.

My professional background includes working in the field of child welfare and juvenile services for the last 30 years. As a private practice trial attorney for over 14 years, I was extensively involved in juvenile court as a parent's attorney, a defense attorney and as a GAL. As the Deputy Chief of the Juvenile Division of the Douglas County Attorney's Office, I prosecuted abuse/neglect, status offense and delinquency cases.

As a Governor appointed Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Services, I was responsible for all aspects of the Nebraska Juvenile Justice System.

Most recently I served as the President and General Counsel for KVC Behavioral Healthcare Nebraska, a foster care and in-home service provider where I was responsible for the implementation of effective service programs for the child welfare system.

These experiences have provided me with the foundation necessary for the work I will be doing in this position. Whether it be interpreting, researching and/or developing policy, analyzing data, providing fiscal management and oversight, or speaking on behalf of children's issues to those in the Legislature, the legal system, or the child welfare system, you can trust that I will be doing it with the best interest of Nebraska's children in mind.

I look forward to meeting each of you as I travel the state to meet with staff, local boards, Judges, attorneys, and speak to groups and others on behalf of child in out-of-home care.

This newsletter is something that I'd like to do at least quarterly. Please let us know if you have items that you'd like to see included in future publications.

We have several workshops planned for this summer so I hope to see you there. In the mean time let me know if you have any particular issues you think should be addressed as we continue our work together on behalf of Nebraska's children.

My door is always open!

Best Wishes,



FCRO Advisory Committee Update

Craig Timm FCRO
Advisory Committee Chair
and Sheree Keely
Committee Member at
State Capitol for their
Confirmation Hearing



As of July 1, 2013, the new law (LB998) formally changed the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board to the Foster Care Review Office. The law also dissolved the FCRB 11 member State Board, and replaced it with a 5 member FCRO Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee includes 3 members selected from the 48 local foster care review boards across the state, 1 member with data analysis experience, and 1 member from the public at large.

In August of 2012, Gov. Dave Heineman appointed the 5 members from a list of names forwarded to him by the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee. The Advisory Committee members are: Craig Timm, Chairperson; Sandy Kruback, Co-Chair; Sheree Keely, Elizabeth Neeley and Michelle Hynes, Committee Members. The Legislature will be confirming all appointments in February.

Since beginning in August, the Committee has been hard at work reviewing all aspects of the FCRO and concentrating their efforts on the hiring of an Executive Director. With that monumental task now completed, they will meet in March to map out the work at hand for 2013.

Legislative Updates

Bills Introduced this year!



State Capitol
News

LB247 (Larson) - Change Nebraska Juvenile Code provisions relating to reimbursement by parents for costs of care and treatment

LB265 (Coash) - Change foster care licensure and kinship home and relative home provisions

LB269 (Campbell) - Change provisions relating to children and families and the Children's Commission

LB355 (Larson) - Change the age of majority and certain age requirements

LB385 (Nordquist) - Prohibit certain basis for discrimination relating to child placement

LB443 (Cook) - Adopt the Children's Residential Facilities and Placing Licensure Act

LB503 (Coash) - Rename the Child Protection Act and provide for alternative response to a report of child abuse or neglect

LB530 (Dubas) - Add, change, and eliminate provisions relating to foster care reimbursements

LB561 (Ashford) - State findings and intent for changes to the juvenile justice system and a funding mechanism

LB562 (Ashford) - Change provisions of the juvenile justice system

For updates, or to watch hearings online through live video streaming, go to <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/>

More on LB 269 on page 3.

LB 269 - Changes Proposed for Child Welfare

LB269, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Kathy Campbell, would make several changes to the state's child welfare system. These proposed changes are a result of legislation passed last session, and an interim study conducted by the Health and Human Services Committee.

Among other provisions, the bill would make the following changes to the Nebraska Children's Commission:

- Move the Commission's staff to the Foster Care Review Office;
- Hire a child welfare policy researcher to support the Commission's work; and
- Add the director of the Foster Care Review Office and the Inspector General of Child Welfare as members of the Commission.

The bill also would require the state Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to:

- Apply for federal reimbursement of costs associated with the Nebraska Juvenile Service Delivery Project;
- Establish new foster home licensing requirements to expand the use of child-specific, relative and kinship placements;
- Secure evidence of financial stability from entities that subcontract with the department to provide child welfare services;
- Develop a policy for reimbursement of all allowable foster care maintenance costs under Title IV-E; and
- Develop and implement a uniform training program for all case managers, whether employed by DHHS or an agency under contract with the state.

Sen. Campbell said the changes would increase Nebraska's Title IV-E funding opportunities from the federal government and provide greater stability to the state's child welfare system.

**The above article is summarized from the State Legislature website.*

About the Foster Care Review Office...

The State Foster Care Review Office's mission is to ensure the best interests of children in out-of-home care are being met through external citizen review, monitoring facilities that house children and youth, maintaining up-to-date data on a statewide tracking system, and disseminating data and recommendations through an Annual Report.

The Foster Care Review Office is a small independent State agency put into being by the State Legislature over 30 years ago, giving the FCRO the responsibility to provide oversight of children in out-of-home care. The FCRO focuses on the needs of children in foster care through reviews, tracking, monitoring and reporting on the identified issues.

The FCRO promotes the best interests of children, using local board reviews and recommendations as a core component of the work we do. Approximately 300 local board members serve as volunteers on 48 boards statewide. These volunteers review the case and make findings and recommendations that are provided in a report and shared with all legal parties to the case within 30 days of the review.

The FCRO provides policy makers and the public with independent information on children in foster care by collecting, updating, analyzing and disseminating data on children in out-of-home care through the agency's independent tracking system.

Data collected throughout our review process has been used over the last three decades to drive systemic change. We advocate for children and their families through individual case review, data analysis, legislation, and pressing for policy and practice reform.

By design, the FCRO works with a number of partners in the child welfare system. This includes the Governor's Office, the Legislature, the Chief Justice, DHHS, the Lead Agency (NFC), and the Courts. Through collaboration, cooperation and common vision, we can take on the challenges and better serve children in out-of-home care.

DATA CORNER

“The average child in out-of-home care on June 30, 2012 had been placed outside the home for 485 days (this figure does not include days placed outside the home during prior removals.)”

The full FCRO Annual Report can be viewed on our website at www.fcro.nebraska.gov

For a printed copy call 402-471-4420

On June 30, 2012, there were 4,341 children in out-of-home care in Nebraska. 29% were age 0-5; 24% were age 6-12; 18% were age 13-15 and 29% were age 16-18. It is also important to note that 38% of these children have been in care previously.

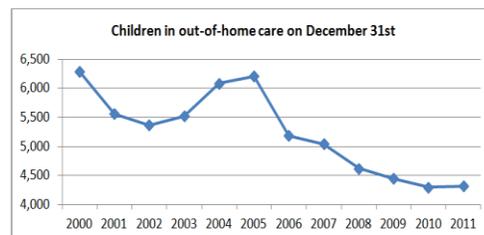
The following include a few of the major recommendations and issues described in the FCRO Annual Report:

1. Assure that children do not unnecessarily linger in foster care.
2. Secure needed documentation so that decisions by all parties can be fact-based.
3. Reduce caseworker changes to stabilize management of children’s cases.
4. Create and implement appropriate, realistic case plans that hold parents accountable and reduce the rate of children returning to foster care.
5. Recruit and develop stable placements for children.
6. Ensure children receive the critical services they need to heal from prior abuse and neglect, and to become successful adults.
7. Closely monitor all contract service providers to ensure children’s best interests are met.

In addition to these major recommendations, we also discussed related issues, such as children’s education, court practices, paternity identification, sibling connections, the special needs of young children, and the unique needs of youth with law violations.

While there is certainly a lot of work to be done to improve conditions for children in the foster care system, there are some positive things occurring.

- The use relative placements have doubled what it was 10 years ago.
- In spite of the current economy putting pressures on families, there are not more children in foster care than a year ago.
- The number of children in care who had prior removals from the home has slightly decreased.
- Legislative oversight has brought new attention to the child welfare system and the need for communication across systems.
- The Through the Eyes of a Child Initiative (Courts) and numerous other meetings of stakeholders have increased understanding and focus on making improvements.
- DHHS and its lead agency have been increasingly responsive to issues raised by the FCRO during reviews and raised by the FCRO due to our analysis of statistics from our independent tracking system.
- There is a greater problem-solving attitude being developed throughout the system that is new and encouraging.



Local Board Updates

This spring, the FCRO will be sending out a survey to local board members via email. A hard copy survey will be mailed to those who do not have an email address. Please complete the survey as soon as possible. We hope for a 100% return this year!

Thank you for your attendance at board meetings – your attendance is crucial to the success of the review!

Please help us recruit new board members. If you know of someone with an interest in advocating for children in out-of-care please refer them to our office.

Throughout all the child welfare system change these past few years, the Foster Care Review Office retained its 300 informed and dedicated local board member volunteers across the State. These volunteers continue to review cases and promote individual children's best interests.

In 2012 volunteers conducted 4,675 reviews.

In 2012 volunteers donated over 36,500 hours.

Thank you local board member volunteers!!

Tips & Tools**Reviewing the Case Plan**

The Child's case plan is the road map to addressing issues that must be resolved in order for the child to achieve and maintain permanency.

Per Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-1312, the case plan/court report must include:

- The purpose for which the child was placed in foster care;
- The estimated length of time necessary to achieve the purposes of the foster care placement;
- A description of the services which are to be provided;
- The persons who are directly responsible for the implementation of the plan;
- A record of previous placements; and
- The name of the school the child shall attend.

Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-285 requires DHHS to prepare this plan. Federal guidelines require goals, objectives and timeframes for the primary plan, and the concurrent plan if identified.

If the youth is age 16 or older, the plan must contain specific goals and objectives for achieving independent living skills. Ask:

- Has there been an Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment completed?
- Is there an Independent Living Plan?
- Are services identified?

If the youth will be exiting foster care to live independently soon, has a 90 Day Transitional Living Plan been written and included for review?

Education

Always ask, "Is the child on track educationally? If the child is 13 or older, ask "Is this youth on track to graduate?" If the answer is no, then are services being offered and provided to assist the youth? (i.e., tutoring)

Websites

Websites that may be beneficial to you as you strive to learn more about children's issues are included below for your convenience.

The Kids Count Annual Report is available at:
<http://voicesforchildren.com/kids-count>

Look for resources or materials specific to FCRO local board members at: www.fcro.nebraska.gov

Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative:
<http://www.throughtheeyes.org>

Center for Children, Families, and the Law:
<http://ccfl.unl.edu/>

Answers 4 Families: www.answers4families.org/

Partnering 4 Students: www.partnering4students.org

Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Families Association:
www.nfapa.org

Local board members play an integral role when they review the child's plan and bring to the legal parties' attention any deficits in the plan. Board recommendations are often noted in court and ordered for the child, or parent.

Foster Care Review Office

521 S. 14th St.
Suite 401
Lincoln, NE 68508

PHONE:
(402) 471-4420
800-577-3272 (NE Only)

FAX:
(402) 471-4437

E-MAIL:
fcro.contact@nebraska.gov

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.fcro.nebraska.gov

Calendar of Events

FCRO Summer Workshops

- May 22, 2013 Lincoln
- June 5, 2013 Omaha
- June 20, 2013 Norfolk
- July 16, 2013 Scottsbluff
- July 18, 2013 North Platte
- July 25, 2013 Grand Island

Workshops will be held from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

**Sites and content information will be announced at a later date.*

New Board Member Training

Omaha:
April 11th & 18th
September 19th & 26th
5:30 pm – 8:30 pm
College of St. Mary, Rm 130

Lincoln:
April 9th & 23rd
September 10th & 17th
5:30 pm – 8:30 pm
FCRO Office 5th Floor

Greater Nebraska: *Sites and times to be announced at a later date.*

Conferences and Trainings from our Partners

Omaha:
April 15-16, 2013
Bridges Out of Poverty

North Platte:
March 23, 2013
Psychotropic Medications

Scottsbluff:
February 16, 2013 (6 hrs)
Mark Hald, Ph.D.: The Impact of Toxic Stress on the Developing Child

Please contact your Review Specialist for a full list of training opportunities, sites and times for your area.

FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE

521 S. 14th St. STE 401
Lincoln, NE 68508-2707

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