



WYOMING DEPARTMENT *of*  
**Family Services**

2300 Capitol Avenue  
Third Floor Hathaway Bldg  
Cheyenne, WY 82002-0490  
Tel: 307.777.7051  
Fax: 307.777.3693  
[dfsweb.state.wy.us](http://dfsweb.state.wy.us)

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TO: The Wyoming Citizen Review Panel (WYCRP)

FROM: Steve Corsi, Director *SC*

DATE: January 13, 2015

RE: DFS Response to the WYCRP 2012 and 2013-2014 Annual Report

REF: SC-15-002

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The Department of Family Services (DFS) recognizes the many changes and transitions the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel (WYCRP) has encountered over the past two (2) years. Despite these changes, DFS appreciates the opportunity to continue the networking with WYCRP and the relationships that continue to be built around the state to promote the safety, well-being and self-sufficiency of Wyoming families.

In acknowledgement of the receipt of the WYCRP Annual Report for 2012 and 2013-2014, we appreciate your time and effort that has contributed to the work completed over the course of the year. Furthermore, we thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations presented by the WYCRP.

**Wyoming Citizen Review Panel 2012 Annual Report**

**Child Protection Team (CPT)**

The WYCRP discussed the creation and administration of regional child protection teams, in an effort to create greater efficiency and effectiveness of the CPT's as they currently exist. These regional CPT's would be organized to align with the nine DFS districts. Both benefits and challenges in regard to regional CPT's were expressed through community discussions and are noted by WYCRP.

**DFS Response:** Child protection teams are created within the local communities in the state with the purpose of identifying and/or developing community resources to serve abused and/or neglected children and their families within that community. Because each community differs in their child protections services, needs and resources, the formation of regional teams may disrupt the teams at the local level. Changes in state statute and DFS policy will also need to be addressed to accommodate the transition from community to regional teams and/or the addition of regional teams. Furthermore, as mentioned in the WYCRP report, travel expenses for members to participate in regional meetings may also be a deterrent.



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### Adult Protective Services SYNC Reviews

The WYCRP report highlighted many great things that are happening around the state in the area of Adult Protection Services (APS), including prevention efforts, community collaboration and commitment to community safety. Areas of concern noted through the SYNC review process included:

1. Confusion on the procedures and case appropriateness for reporting to Medicaid Fraud.

**DFS Response:** Training in Core, review of APS policy and quarterly APS meetings will continue to address how and when to report to Medicaid Fraud. In addition, the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit staff has offered to do trainings in local offices and/or at APS Community Team meetings. Additional trainings will be provided by the state APS Analyst in partnership with Medicaid Fraud Control Unit when requested.

2. In the intake process, there is a lack of understanding and confusion around a clear definition of vulnerable adult and what determines an adult that has capacity for decision making.

**DFS Response:** The definition of a vulnerable adult will be addressed in on-going trainings with staff. Capacity to consent is determined in a court proceeding; so we will have a representative from the court systems or Wyoming Guardianship partner with us on the trainings.

3. Reviewers noted difficulties in reviewing APS files as there is not a standardized file to be used, and it creates files to be inconsistent.

**DFS Response:** Standardization of APS files is an on-going discussion as there is not a policy. The state office will support efforts to do this and provide information as requested.

4. Because of the different variables associated with APS as compared to child protection, workers reported it was difficult to transition between the different programs.

**DFS Response:** DFS has 19 designated APS workers in the field offices. Realizing the differences in APS and Child Protection Services (CPS) cases, there are on-going APS related trainings in every community by our partnering agencies. Also, webinars are provided to staff, supervisors and managers by the National Adult Protective Services Association and the National Center on Elder Abuse. Trainings will continue to be offered and facilitated within communities by the state office.



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5. The WYCRP suggested that APS emergency funds be allocated at the local level, and each office be allowed more individualized control over the funding for the needs of the local community. This suggestion was a result of local offices having difficulties accessing the emergency funds and not receiving funding in a timely manner.

**DFS Response:** APS has emergency service funds that are allocated state- wide and approved at a local level per policy (2009).

### **Wyoming Advocates for Youth (WAY)**

The WYCRP's WAY program included efforts which consisted of leading youth focus groups, participating in permanency roundtables, and hosting the national CRP meeting. WAY has foster care alumni groups in Casper, Cheyenne and Laramie. Alumni participated in an open forum roundtable discussion at the national conference which facilitated conversation around foster care placement. Some of their recommendations included:

1. WYCRP and DFS will compose a survey of foster parents and youth in regards to obtaining drivers licenses and transitional planning.

**DFS Response:** A foster care survey was completed in May 2014. The survey was distributed to foster care alumni, providers, DFS caseworkers, and stakeholders in an effort to obtain helpful information and feedback.

2. DFS will assist the Youth Committee in the drafting of legislation for the Foster Care Bill of Rights.

**DFS Response:** The DFS Youth Advisory group met with Wyoming State Representative, Dan Kirkbride, and determined the bill would not be introduced at this time. It was recommended the advisory group seek supporters for legislation, including but not limited to, the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) project, and the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program. DFS continues to build the Youth Bill of Rights into practice.

### **Wyoming Child Death Review and Prevention Team (WCDRPT)**

Nine (9) child major injury and/or fatality case files were reviewed by the WCDRPT. The injuries and fatalities are a result of child abuse and/or neglect, and are reviewed by the team to advocate for child victims by making recommendations for change through prevention, intervention, training, education, legislation and public policy. Some of the recommendations made by the WCDRPT, as a result of these file reviews included:

1. Training provided by DFS to members of the team would be beneficial in the area of investigations and compilation of case files.



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**DFS Response:** Trainings have been on-going with the WCDRPT, including forensic investigations; sexual abuse and assault investigations; and autopsy and coroner investigations. We also have representatives from DFS and law enforcement on the team to answer questions that may arise during the case reviews.

2. Specific services provided by DFS to the family, either prior to or after the incident, should be clearly listed in the case files.

**DFS Response:** When child major injury and/or fatality files are provided to the WCDRPT for review, the file may only consist of the specific incident, investigation and findings/conclusion. DFS attempts to provide all related case information, including prior history with the department. However, the primary objective of the WCDRPT case reviews is to review the major injury/fatality incident; information related to prior history and post case management may not be available to the team.

3. Consistent policies between all DFS offices and courts statewide in handling reunifications.

**DFS Response:** In regard to family reunification, there exist federal guidelines, state law and agency rules and policy to guide the child welfare system. However, inconsistencies in the handling of reunification may exist within the communities, courts, and case-specific circumstances.

4. Education and awareness of child abuse and neglect, including mandated reporting.

**DFS Response:** DFS contracts with Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming (PCAWY) to conduct community education and awareness of mandatory reporting and the signs of child abuse and neglect. This education also includes training with hospitals and medical professionals.

5. Consistent policy and procedures in the handling of cases by DFS if personal relationship or standings exist.

**DFS Response:** DFS has a Special Investigation policy which addresses the above recommendation and is handled by the DFS Social Services Analyst who manages all Special Investigations statewide.

6. Coroner reports, death certificates and toxicology reports should be included in all fatality cases files that are reviewed.



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**DFS Response:** It continues to be a challenge for DFS to have access and obtain coroner reports and death certificates on all fatality cases. This is especially challenging if the child is treated in a hospital out of state and expires in another state. DFS is collaborating with local coroner offices and the state vital statistics agency to help with DFS' ability to obtain these reports. It is also beneficial to have county coroners on the WCDRPT.

7. Investigate a tracking system of families linked with CPS, who move around Wyoming, including out of state.

**DFS Response:** DFS has a state-wide CPS data system in which child protection referrals and families with DFS involvement are entered into. DFS caseworkers are also able to either refer families or obtain information on families to and from other offices within Wyoming. If referrals to or case history from other states is needed, procedures exist in which CPS and law enforcement agencies can collaborate for the safety and protection of children and families.

8. DFS should investigate adopting a policy for recognizing efforts and individuals in the community who are instrumental in saving lives of children and families.

**DFS Response:** DFS works collaboratively with community and state agencies in recognizing and providing awareness to those that are instrumental in promoting the safety, well-being and self-sufficiency of children and families in Wyoming.

9. There should be a system for families to utilize to easily identify safe and licensed child care options.

**DFS Response:** DFS child care licensers are responsible for the licensing and monitoring of day care and child care providers in an effort to ensure the safety of children in certified child care facilities. The public has access to the names and locations of those licensed facilities. Families also have the ability to apply for child care assistance in local DFS offices. However, parents and caretakers have the option to use non-certified child care providers. There also tends to be difficulties in finding providers who are willing to provide child care in the evenings and night, weekends, and/or holidays.

### **Wyoming Home Visitation Collaboration (Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation – MIECHV grant)**

This home visitation program is an excellent opportunity to provide parent education to at-risk families and parents of young children. The Parents as Teachers program under the MIECHV grant has been implemented in four (4) at-risk counties in Wyoming, and provides extra support and supervision in homes with children under the age of three.



**Wyoming Citizen Review Panel 2013-2014 Annual Report**

**Child Protection/Juvenile Probation Reviews and Adult Protection Services SYNC Reviews**

The WYCRP was able to do case file reviews in three locations, including Cody/Powell, Rawlins and Gillette. In conjunction with the reviews, Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming (PCAWY) and DFS presented on mandated reporting policy and procedures to local medical personnel, and a community meeting of partners and stakeholders was held.

Following each review, the WYCRP provided a report to the local office with findings of their reviews and stakeholder interviews, along with community-specific recommendations. The local offices then had the opportunity to respond to the findings and recommendations of the WYCRP.

Included in the annual report are recommendations/requests for the state DFS office that will have a positive impact for DFS statewide:

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** (Page 16 – Requests for the state DFS office)

1. Provide additional WYCAPS training and field adjustment edits with input from the local offices.
2. Reduce duplication of forms (both in WYCAPS and paper versions) by requesting input from the local offices on the redundancies of reporting.
3. Purchase of iPads for all offices to use for on-call so they are able to easily access WYCAPS without returning to the office. This is a primary safety concern when it is necessary for staff to respond to a call in the middle of the night. Also implement the dictation pen in each local office as this promoted more efficiency with documentation as the case worker can upload case notes into the computer system.
4. Assess staffing ratios related to staff-aids. Staff aids are able to assist with office operations and paperwork allowing case workers time to focus on supporting the families with direct contact.
5. State office workers perform more face-to-face contacts with the local offices to understand the direct field operations and directly support the work at that level. It provides an opportunity for both parties to understand the demands placed at all levels of the agency.
6. Provide additional trainings for staff in the local areas related to worker wellbeing (secondary trauma) and offer supportive services as needed. This needs to be an ongoing training and an ongoing conversation with upper management.



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7. Implement Signs of Safety in all areas.
8. Provide local forensic trainings around the state so that it is more readily available.
9. Provide a state wide messaging campaign to recruit foster parents. Consider utilizing alumni as a resource for messaging development.
10. Initiate a statewide messaging campaign and community training modules focused on explaining the roles and restrictions of DFS personnel.
11. Advocate at the federal level related to face-to-face contacts in neighboring states and the possibility of creating additional ICPCs.
12. Offer more trainings for foster parents related to RAD and FASD.
13. Reassess staffing needs, primarily APS due to the expanding elderly population and the increased incidence of financial exploitation.
14. Investigate options for CHINS cases as there a few individuals who are interested in seeing the age extended past 17.
15. Investigate the roll of the state office in possible legislative changes to Title 25 to determine the best course of action. It may be of benefit for the director and the judges of the state to have a discussion about the issues related to Title 25.
16. Address permanency delays and establish local programming to assist with earlier determinations.

**DFS Response:** The Child and Family Services (CFS) five-year plan for DFS includes the evaluation and revision of initial and on-going training to all staff to ensure effectiveness and relevance. The areas recommended by WYCRP have and/or are currently being addressed by DFS' training unit, including training in the areas of: policy, investigations and interviewing, safety and needs assessments, strategies for cases involving youth, wrap around, permanency, transition and reentry, independent living, and WYCAPS training. Additionally, all DFS caseworkers continue to be cross-trained in the areas of child protection, adult protection and juvenile services, and are to mentor with another worker that has experience in each area. All caseworkers should have the opportunity to do this so they will be an additional resource and support in their local offices.



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A casework training curriculum has been established for new workers. This training will not only offer instruction in a classroom setting, but will also consist of modules to be trained in the office by supervisors and lead workers. The state office has also implemented a training curriculum for on-site training in field offices to assist with expedited certification of caseworkers. Additionally, trainings and community meetings are being conducted around the state to assist with the collaboration of those agencies and stakeholders involved with the child welfare system in their area. With these community stakeholder meetings, our hope is to increase the overall effectiveness of the child welfare system and to also increase the array of services in each community for children and families.

In an effort to support the work at local levels, meet the needs of individual field offices and to understand direct field operations, the state office will be spending more time in local offices and communities. This will be accomplished with training being provided at the local level and in the communities, and with the on-going case reviews in the field offices.

Within the Child Welfare portion of the CFS five-year plan, is the continued implementation of Signs of Safety (SOS), or a practice similar to SOS, to ensure the parents and/or caretakers and family is involved in identifying their safety factors and needs so that appropriate services can be provided to the family. This practice will also ensure the family is engaged in their safety planning and case planning, and to continue to identify the needs of their children and family. Currently, SOS has been implemented in four (4) counties around the state, including Campbell County, Laramie County, Natrona County and Sweetwater County.

Regarding the increased incidence of adult financial exploitation, it is critical to have banking personnel be on the local community adult protection teams, as this was mandated in statute in 2007. Additionally, the opportunity to have educational in-services to DFS staff and community members from law enforcement and the banking industry has been very helpful. Many communities have identified resources that would assist in other communities. The state office continues to send out webinars and trainings on the topic of financial exploitation and these are archived for later reference and viewing on national websites such as NCEA (National Center on Elder Abuse) and NAPSA (National Adult Protective Services Association). In addition, materials have been provided to all field offices, law enforcement, and county and district attorneys on the formation and importance of Financial Abuse Specialist teams. To date, two (2) counties have these teams and one county is in the planning stage.

In an effort to continue increasing the efficiency for field workers and for the agency, the state office is looking into upgraded technological support. DFS has purchased iPads and dictation pens for some field offices and/or workers as a pilot project, and continue





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to look at options to assist the field and staff in the timeliness and effectiveness of their work.

Another goal of the CFS five-year plan is to have a Youth Focus Group to ensure all youth involved with DFS are working towards permanency from their first day at intake throughout the life of their case. This plan towards permanency will include the youth being involved in their case planning, having involvement in their permanency plan, being involved in their MDT's and their transitioning plans. Also included in the Youth Focus Group is the goal to increase the effectiveness of communication and collaboration between DFS, placement agencies, home community agencies, and the schools, in an effort to ensure all youth are working towards successful permanency.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS** (Page 23 - Foster Parent Survey):

1. Coordinate with Medicaid to determine available providers in each area. Include a list of providers in all foster parent information packets. Due to lack of Medicaid providers in Wyoming related to medical, dental and mental health, the state of Wyoming Department of Family Services and the state of Wyoming Department of Health-Rural Health Division should coordinate efforts to recruit providers into the identified areas to support services for foster children in Wyoming.
2. "Normalcy" activities and opportunities need to be offered to all foster children. There needs to be an internal assessment of how to determine supports for foster parents in order to accomplish such tasks as providing an opportunity for driving with youth, providing recreational activities and employment to youth including transportation and costs for enrollment.
3. Provide access to required documentation for children in foster care so that foster parents have the ability to best meet the needs of these children while in their care. Transitional youth also need access to these documents and education on the importance of these documents as they transition into independent living.
4. Ensure that there are policies in place to provide foster parents an opportunity to be involved in MDT activities as well as an opportunity to express supports the child may need to be successful in placement.
5. Ensure all foster parents are educated about the importance of reunification and what their expectations will be in this process. Foster parents should be part of the initial permanency determination so that their expectations are clearly defined.
6. Provide additional training opportunities and topics relevant to foster parent's needs. Some areas of interest expressed in the survey and during the local case reviews include



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RAD, FASD, trauma bonds, behavioral interventions and implementations, teen trainings, ADHD nutrition, car seat safety, adoption, drugs (signs of use), and mandated reporting and the process.

7. Further investigate a mentoring program for foster parents. This may be a useful recruiting tool. The importance of this effort was expressed in a comment from the survey. "Have each new foster family set up with a mentor of an experienced foster family. It's scary and hard and when you can go to someone who knows what you're going through it helps a lot. Mentor System!!!! Also When I was trained I was never taught how to do the monthly paper work and invoices. It would have been helpful if I was shown that ahead of time."

**DFS Response:** Overall, the foster parent survey was a useful tool to acquire information from individuals who are directly impacted by interactions with the child welfare system. It is imperative that these families are supported through this process in order to retain the invaluable services they provide to Wyoming children.

DFS is addressing foster care related recommendations not already covered by policy, training or existing laws in the Child and Family Services Plan covering FFY 2015 - 2019 with the assistance of the Foster/Adoption Recruitment and Retention Focus Group and Foster Care Coordinators and will look at incorporating recommendations not already covered when policy is updated. The CQI process will also be instrumental in identifying best practices and challenges locally and statewide which will be shared or addressed as identified.

DFS collaborates with numerous organizations and agencies including the WYCRP, the Children's Justice Project, the Wyoming Guardians ad Litem Program and the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) through various partnerships.

WDH has a provider locator look-up on their website to help identify local providers who will take Medicaid which can be found at: <https://wyequalitycare.acs-inc.com/wy/client/general/providerLocator.do>

The Children's Justice Project has a number of publications of interest to youth, foster parents and the legal system at: <http://www.courts.state.wy.us/Initiatives/CJP>

### **RECOMMENDATIONS** (Page 30 - Youth Survey):

1. Ensure that case workers are educating youth on transitional resources especially those related to transportation, housing, medical eligibility (Medicaid), and ETV.
2. Coordinate with the Wyoming Department of Education to ensure that as foster youth transition between schools that credits are maintained for graduation. Empower youth



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to have conversations with the local schools to ensure their academics are in alignment for graduation.

3. Implement permanency round table discussions in all offices for youth at least by the age of 16 to ensure that a transition plan is in place. As part of the permanency round tables and MDTs, the youth would benefit from an alumni advocate to empower them to direct their transitional plan (especially for those that will age out of care).
4. Coordinate with Life Net to establish courses/trainings for youth that are meaningful for transition to independent living.
5. Investigate why youth do not have a higher percentage rate of contact with their caseworkers.

**DFS Response:** Overall, the foster youth survey was a useful tool to acquire information from youth who are directly impacted in the child welfare system. The feedback that youth are able to provide to the state is invaluable as they have first-hand experience. There is a great deal to be learned from their perspective.

DFS is addressing recommendations regarding the Youth Survey not already covered by policy or training in the CFS five-year plan covering FFY 2015 - 2019 with the assistance of the Youth Focus group and the Independent/Transitional Living Coordinators. The CQI process will also be instrumental in identifying best practices and challenges locally and statewide which will be shared or addressed as identified.

DFS collaborates with numerous organizations and agencies including the WCRP, the Wyoming Department of Education, the Children's Justice Project, the Wyoming Guardians ad Litem Program and the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) through various partnerships.

### **Wyoming Child Death Review and Prevention Team**

The Wyoming Child Death Review and Prevention Team (WCDRPT) strive to minimize child major injuries and fatalities in Wyoming through comprehensive, multi-disciplinary case reviews. They actively advocate for child victims by making recommendations for change through prevention, intervention, training, education, legislation, and public policy. Between June 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014 the WCDRPT reviewed 10 case files, given to the team as a result of abuse or neglect from DFS.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS: (Page 37)**

1. Public awareness and education efforts surrounding shaken baby syndrome and child abuse/neglect prevention.



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2. Utilization of the DFS SS-51 form for all child major injury and fatality cases that are reviewed.
3. Encourage Department of Corrections to develop a training and education curriculum, if one does not currently exist, for incarcerated sex offenders.
4. Continued public education regarding the role and restrictions of DFS, and what resources are available, specifically to the removal of children from their home.
5. Training curriculum for law enforcement specific to investigations and involvement with infants and children, including trauma-informed care.

**DFS Response:** With the continued collaboration with WYCRP and PCAWY, DFS is expanding its outreach to communities around Wyoming, in an effort to keep children and families safe. PCAWY provides prevention trainings and access to free educational and informative materials by individuals, groups and organizations. Included in these resources is the Shaken Baby Syndrome Campaign.

DFS has on-going efforts to educate and collaborate with community citizens, agencies and stakeholders on awareness of the child welfare system. Included in these efforts, is the collaboration with law enforcement and medical professionals in communities to bring awareness to child abuse and neglect, and to also define the roles of each agency in protecting children. Furthermore, the Drug Endangered Children (DEC) initiative has been, and continues to be implemented, in communities around the state. DEC is a collaborative effort with law enforcement, DFS and the schools to recognize and work with at-risk children and families.

DFS appreciates the opportunity to continue the networking with WYCRP and the relationships that continue to be built around the state to promote the safety, well-being and self-sufficiency of Wyoming families.