**Sheridan County Department of Family Services Review**

Date of Review: February 2-3, 2015

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

Total Interviews:

DFS Staff – 9

Community Stakeholders – 22

Foster Parent Meeting -5

**Sheridan County Demographics:**

* As of 2013 Sheridan County’s population was 29,824 people.

**Strengths:**

1. The CPS department has a great working relationship with the stakeholders. The stake holders know that they will be responded to within a day or two. This may include returning a phone call or an email. Some workers will even send a text message if need be. This making stake holders willing to work with DFS even more.
2. Signs of Safety is beginning to be implemented in this office, caseworkers are using tools and slowly incorporating what they learned.
3. Workers in the Sheridan office are fully aware of resources there are in the community and use them to the fullest. One unique resource for foster families is the Sheridan Foster Parent Exchange which provides clothing and other resources.
4. Caseworkers report that overall they are able to complete their face to faces visits on a monthly basis including out of state contacts. For their high risk cases caseworkers are trying to see the kids once every week if possible. Juvenile probation is making this a priority as well.
5. The MDT’s are well supported with the stakeholders and caseworkers by holding each other accountable to meet the needs of the families.
6. Sheridan County has a strong CPT team that meets monthly. The team has 15 members including law enforcement and the county attorney.
7. It is reported that law enforcement and DFS are coordinating services in the community.
8. This office has reported that most of the staff are crossed trained however there has been some resistance to the concept.
9. Children under the age of six who have gone into placement are being referred to the Child Development Centers for the mandatory screenings. Case workers are letting the foster parents do this at their convenience but do make sure that they are being done within the first 30 days of being in the foster home. The case workers would prefer sooner than 30 days if it is possible.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

1. Sheridan County is experiencing a lack of foster families as other around the state however they seem to manage their foster parent resources adequately.
2. It is reported that it is difficult for foster parents to acquire respite care for the foster children in their area. Foster families would like to investigate other options for respite such as relative care.
3. It was reported that transitioning youth are having difficulty acquiring the skills needed for independent living such as financial management skills and resources to continue utilizing mental health services.
4. The local office is familiar with the Drug Endangered Children program but would benefit from more in-depth knowledge on the benefits of coordination of services.
5. There are concerns expressed that as jobs are vacated, they may not be refilled which would increase burdens to the remaining staff.
6. It has been reported that there are no child psychiatrists in the area.
7. It is reported that more in-depth training of new foster parents would be beneficial especially related to topics such as how to introduce a child into the home.
8. Local resources for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the area are limited.

**Recommendation (local and state)**

1. Continued training for WYCAPS when updates have been made would be beneficial.
2. Further training with law enforcement and staff regarding procedures for drug endangered children.
3. Offer acknowledgment to foster parents throughout the year so that they feel appreciated for the work they are doing. A suggestion for this would be a thank you letter from the district manager.
4. It was suggested that caseworkers set up ride alongs with law enforcement so that there is a better understanding of what law enforcement does on a daily basis.
5. A statewide foster parent recruitment effort would be beneficial to have options for placement, especially for older youth and children with disabilities.
6. Investigate training opportunities for foster parents related to the specific needs that are identified by the foster parents. Some suggestions include sexual assault and FASD.
7. A training for stakeholders for mandatory reporting and signs and symptoms. This would be a refresher to some and an educational tool for new stakeholders.
8. Open respite options up, such as allowing care from approved family members.
9. It would be beneficial for the community to consider options for acquiring a forensic interview facility. Children are currently being transported to Casper for this service.

**Summary:**

Sheridan County is working together to improve the lives of children and families. It is beneficial that Sheridan has adequate resources to meet most of the needs of families. Wyoming is a rural state which makes it necessary to utilize some resources out of the area to meet the needs of children and families. This office prides itself on open communication with the stakeholders. It is apparent that the caseworkers in this office have the best interest of the child as the primary focus on service delivery.