



MONDAY MORNING MEMO

Monday, December 17, 2007 ☞ Volume 2, Issue 17

CASA Focus Group Provides Feedback to OCFS for Upcoming Federal Review

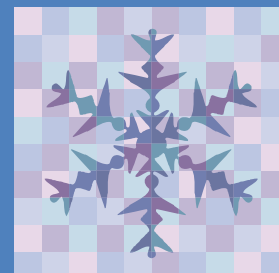
This month, representatives of the CASA network met with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to provide feedback about the strengths and challenges of the child welfare system and permanency process for children. CASA was one of a number of groups with whom OCFS has met in anticipation of next year's federal review of the child protection system, the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).

The CFSR measures states' compliance with Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act and assesses performance on safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. The review, the second of its kind, is conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The review measures the permanency process as a whole, which includes not only the performance of OCFS but of community-based agencies and the courts as well.

The CASA focus group was asked to offer their perspective about why NYS OCFS is getting the measures it is getting, what influences those measures, and what successes and obstacles to reducing time to permanency occur, particularly in cases involving substance abuse or physical and mental health challenges.

Representing the CASA network were Jackie Boissonault, Children's Advocacy Services in Westchester County; Mary Rich, CASA, Dutchess County; Barbara Benedict, CASA, Onondaga County; Pamela O'Leary, NYC CASA; Robin Robinson, NYS CASA Association; and Darlene Ward, CASA Assistance Program, NYS Unified Court System. In addition, a number of local directors provided comments in writing. Representing OCFS were Claire Strohmeier and Joanne Passero.

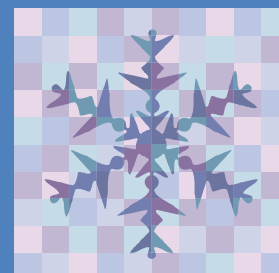
Strengths identified by the CASA group included: best practice courts; youth advocacy and Teen Courts; children's appearance in the courtroom; shortened timelines required by recent permanency laws; comprehensive permanency reports; one judge/one family; more extensive advocacy on education issues; DSS and court collaborations; changes in law guardian reimbursement; use of mediation; increase in adoption subsidies; and greater awareness of the impact of trauma on children.



*With Gratitude for
the Hope You All
Bring to the Lives
of Children...*

*Every Wish
for a
Happy Holiday
Season*

*And a Peaceful
and Prosperous
New Year*





Areas of continued improvement noted included: more focus on the essential nature of visitation; more training and resources devoted to Interstate Compact cases; more community resources available for children's mental health treatment; and continued expansion of awareness and resources for adolescents aging out of care and infants entering the system. Challenges of working with relatives as options for placement and adoption were noted, as was the need for continued focus on strengths-based approaches to birth parents. The need for more Family Court judges was noted.

The focus group discussed how CASA can be of help in meeting some of these challenges as OCFS moves forward with its Performance Improvement Plan. CASA volunteers can assist local Departments of Social Service in identifying resources for the family and finding creative solutions to needs as they arise. CASA, as a neutral entity, can help in cases where parents may be resistant to DSS involvement, and assist in monitoring compliance with court orders. CASA also facilitates a focus on the child, and can help create a current and comprehensive profile of children for the courts. Particularly in cases where the child has been placed in an institutional setting, CASA can provide a constant contact for the child throughout the life of the case.

~~~~~ The A-Train ~~~~~

Video Training Set on NYS Laws and Permanency Timelines

A video training on the NYS-specific elements of child welfare laws and family court procedures will be held Friday, January 25, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. The training, cosponsored by UCS and CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS, will feature the Chapter Two customization material required for CASA volunteer training as part of the revised National CASA Volunteer Training.

Presenter will be **Christine Kiesel**, Statewide Project Manager, Child Welfare Court Improvement Project. The training can be viewed at local Family Courts. We will set up sites ahead of time, and will notify all local directors of the sites closest to them. If you are interested in viewing the training, please contact Darlene Ward at daward@courts.state.ny.us at your earliest convenience.

Save the Date:

Video Training

**"A CASA Guide to New York's Laws,
Child Welfare Procedures and
Family Courts: Moving a Child to
Permanence."**

**Friday, Jan. 25, 2008
1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

The intent is to record the training and post on the UCS website for future download. Questions or areas you want to see addressed in the training may be emailed ahead of time to daward@courts.state.ny.us. Written materials and sign-on information will be sent to local directors in January.



CASA Directors' Meeting and Substance Abuse Training To Be Held in Albany March 31-April 2

The next meeting of the CASA Program Directors will be held March 31-April 1, 2007 in the Albany area. This meeting will be coordinated by the NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program in collaboration with CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS.

On Wednesday, April 2, 2008, we will be holding a one-day training on issues faced by families dealing with substance abuse. That meeting is open to CASA volunteers, board members, and staff as well as colleagues in the community. Both meetings will be held in Albany. For more information and/or to assist in planning either event, contact Darlene Ward, daward@courts.state.ny.us.

NYWPA Conference to Address Impact of Poverty

The New York Public Welfare Association's Annual Winter Conference will be held in January 22-25, 2008 at the Albany Marriott Hotel. The theme of this year's conference is "Transcending Poverty." Keynote speaker will be Philip Devol of aha! Process, Inc., who will discuss strategies for professionals and communities to improve outcomes for families living in poverty. For more information, go to www.nypwa.com.

Resources

Data Archive Available from Cornell University

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect is available through a project of the Family Life Development Center, the College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. There are a number of datasets available at that site, as well as publications of additional research. Go to:
http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/NDACAN/Useful_Links.html

Quote of the Week

"Don't let what you can't do stand in the way of what you can."

- John Wooden

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