



CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT ACT

CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS 2017-18 FISCAL YEAR



CAPTA Citizen Review Panels

In 1996, an amendment to the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandated that every state establish at least three citizen review panels composed of members of the community to select and research an issue within the child welfare system and make recommendations to improve related child welfare policies and practices. Each year, CRB selects three counties as sites for a panel. Baker County, Linn County, and Multnomah County were selected as sites for the 2017-18 fiscal year (FY).

Panels were composed of members representing local foster youth; former Department of Human Services (DHS) parent clients; foster parents; the Citizen Review Board (CRB), Oregon's citizen foster care review program; CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates); faith and business communities; social service organizations; the Court; attorneys representing the state, and attorneys representing parents and children in dependency cases.

With a few exceptions, each Panel met four times:

- Once for a PUBLIC FORUM where members of the public were invited to learn more about opportunities and challenges facing the local child welfare system, and to suggest issues they wanted the Panel to consider for its area of focus in the coming year; and
- Three times for Panel meetings—

FIRST meeting to select an area of focus, and identify subject matter expert speakers they wanted to hear from and research and data they wanted to collect;

SECOND meeting to hear from the subject matter expert speakers and review the collected research and data; and

THIRD meeting to develop recommendations to improve child welfare policies and practices.

Instead of a public forum, the Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel held a youth input event to gather ideas from foster youth on areas of focus. Also, the Linn County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel held one additional Panel meeting to hear from subject matter expert speakers and develop recommendations on a second area of focus.

The following report of the Panels' findings and recommendations was submitted to Oregon's Child Welfare Director on May 15, 2018. DHS then has six months to respond in writing whether or how they intend to incorporate the Panels' recommendations into their improvement efforts. The report and response also will be part of DHS' annual Title IV-B Progress and Service Report to the federal government.

A special thank you is owed to all the Panel members and subject matter expert speakers who participated in this project. If one is searching for hope, they need look no further than you.

Past Panel Locations*

2012-13 FY

Deschutes County
Lane County
Lincoln County

2014-15 FY

Douglas County
Lane County
Multnomah County

2016-17 FY

Benton County
Multnomah County
Umatilla and Morrow Counties

2013-14 FY

Deschutes County
Lane County
Lincoln County

2015-16 FY

Douglas County
Lane County
Multnomah County

2017-18 FY

Baker County
Linn County
Multnomah County

*DHS transferred coordination of the Panels to CRB in 2012.

AREA OF FOCUS

Foster parent recruitment, support, and retention.

PANEL MEMBERS

Former Foster Youth (1)

Former DHS Parent Clients (3)

Foster Parent (1)

Citizen Review Board

Kent Bailey, Board Member

Elizabeth Huntsman, Board Member

John Nichols, Field Manager

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Kathleen Davis, CASA

Jill Finney, Program Manager

Mary Collard, Executive Director

Faith Community

Cliff Cole, Compassion Center Director

Business Community

Sony Vela, Community Bank Branch
Manager

Higher Education

Dr. Daniel Koopman, Director of Blue
Mountain Community College,
Baker City

Department of Human Services

Chris Black, District Manager

Emily Butler, Social Service Specialist 1

Court

Honorable Gregory L Baxter, Baker
County Circuit Court Judge

Attorneys

Matt Shirtcliff, District Attorney

Kyra Rohner-Ingram, Public Defender

Baker County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Baker County is a mostly rural county in eastern Oregon with a population of 16,134 (2010 Census). The county spans 3,088 square miles—about 1,000 square miles larger than the state of Connecticut. The economy is supported primarily through agriculture, stock raising, logging, and tourism; and Baker City is the county seat and largest city (population 9,828).

The Baker County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel included 19 members representing local foster youth, former DHS parent clients, foster parents, CRB, CASA, faith and business communities, higher education, child welfare, the Court, the District Attorney's Office, and attorneys who represent parents and children in dependency cases.

Public Forum

Before their first meeting, the Panel hosted a public forum where members of the public were invited to learn more about the local child welfare system, and to suggest issues the Panel should consider for its area of focus in the coming year. The public forum was held on Wednesday, September 27, 2017 from 6—8 PM at the Baker County Fairgrounds (see [editorial](#) in Baker City Herald).

Forum attendees heard from four local speakers: a CASA, an Independent Living Program provider, a DHS Permanency Supervisor, and a former DHS parent client. The speakers talked about common misconceptions people have about foster care, opportunities and challenges facing the local child welfare system, ways that system is achieving its goals, and where it might need to improve. Some of the local challenges identified were:

- DHS is having to place children in other counties because there are not enough foster families in Baker County;
- Mental health and addiction (particularly opiate addiction) issues appear to be increasing faster than local treatment capacity;
- DHS parent clients often cannot find housing due to their background, and more transitional housing is needed for parents who complete residential drug and alcohol treatment;
- Caseworkers spend a lot of time arranging the limited services available in Baker County when they could be spending this time caring for children;
- Because the county is so spread out, transportation issues make it difficult for parents to get to services;



I often hear from people ‘I could never do that because of the goodbye.’ My response is that any relationship worth having is hard at the end.

- foster parent

- There are not enough parenting classes;
- The amount of services parents must complete is often overwhelming for someone with addiction issues; and
- The system is slow to change.

On the other hand, the speakers identified opportunities in Baker County’s strong network of support, and how the local DHS office now has more staff than before with its four child protective services workers and three permanency workers.

Public forum attendees then participated in a group activity to generate a list of ideas for the Panel to consider for its area of focus. The ideas suggested were:

- Time to permanency for children;
- Prevention supports for families before a child protective services assessment is opened;
- Foster parent recruitment, support, and retention;
- Individualized services for families; and
- System accountability.

Panel Meetings

The Baker County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel held its first meeting on November 1, 2017 where panel members almost unanimously selected foster parent recruitment, support, and retention as their area of

focus. The Panel also identified a list of additional subject matter experts they wanted to hear from, and research and data they wanted to collect.

At their second meeting on March 14, 2018, the Panel had the opportunity to interview eight individuals, each with unique insights into the foster system in Baker County. They included a former foster youth, two former DHS parent clients, three local foster parents, a local DHS Certifier, and the statewide DHS Foster Care and Youth Transitions Program Manager. Below are summarized highlights from those interviews.

Can you give a sense of how great the need is for additional foster homes in Baker County?

(Certifier) Baker County only has two general applicant foster homes that are accepting children. The other seven are at full capacity. While we have three new families working through the certification process, there is an immediate need for twenty additional general applicant foster homes.

If you met someone who was considering becoming a foster parent, what advice would you give them?

(Foster Parent #1) I often hear from people ‘I could never do that because of the goodbye.’ My response is that any relationship worth having is hard at the end. Grief is a ‘you’ thing. In return, you get to help someone broken get whole again. I get to see families come back together.

(Foster Parent #2) Try to be patient, flexible, and a ‘yes’ person. Think of yourself as part of the team. Sometimes your relationship with DHS, an attorney, or other party will become strained. If you have a

history of being a team player, you may be able to cash in some of those points. People considering fostering need to know that they are co-parenting with the state and everyone else. It's going to feel like they have the least say.

Thinking of the foster parents you've worked with, what qualities and/or approaches to fostering have you appreciated?

(Certifier) I have the privilege to work with a lot of great families. The qualities that I most appreciate are honesty and open communication. The feedback about what is working and not working allows me to give the families extra support. Also, flexibility is a must because foster parenting throws a lot of curve balls. It also helps when the foster parent is supportive of reunification with a parent and understands that this is the priority. Sometimes a case may appear to be going in one direction and then unexpectedly goes in another direction.

(Parent #1) I appreciated the foster parents who were open, hands on, and worked with us. It's really important that they understand the return to parent plan, and helps when they communicate with parents and include parents in activities like sports events.

(Foster Youth) It really helps if foster parents can remain calm under any circumstances. The children coming into the home need it. I came home one day and there was another kid placed with my foster parent and he was dead set on destroying everything in his path. I observed my foster parent be so patient and loving towards him. She just gave him a hug and fixed him dinner.

When you started fostering, you probably had certain expectations. What is similar to how you thought it would be and what is different?

(Foster Parent #1) I knew I'd be working with kids on a day to day basis and that every child would be different. What I didn't expect is how much empathy I would have for birth parents and grandparents. And that even though they might be kind, some just cannot protect their children.



(Foster Parent #2) You really don't know how to deal with the behaviors you will experience fostering until you do it. These children are coming into care with extreme trauma. I also thought we'd have a better picture of how long we'd have the kids, but nobody can predict how long the children will be in your care.

(Foster Parent #3) For every new foster parent, there's the moment when the children are in your home and you're like 'Wow, these are someone's kids. What do I do with them? Do I play with them?' Now, I know to just be easy going. I try to ease their fears.

What supports are available for foster parents?

(Certifier) Foster parents can contact a certifier or caseworker for support. Respite is available if needed and I can help connect them with a provider. I help them find services and sometimes serve as a mediator between the foster parent and caseworker. I also always encourage foster parents to support each other. We have scholarships for different activities and a quarterly newsletter. Kindred Support Services can provide in-home education services to foster parents as well, but those services are limited.

(Program Manager) The statewide Caregiver Support and Development Workgroup has done a lot of focus groups with foster parents. They participated in a successful effort to obtain an additional \$750,000 from the Oregon Legislature for statewide foster parent support activities like respite, training, and flexible funding for initial items needed when a child enters foster care. The Oregon Legislature also just approved an additional \$375 per month stipend for

foster parents who need daycare to work.

(Foster Parent #1) CASA is a huge support. They are very involved, hold events like Christmas parties, and coordinate other gestures of appreciation. I tell them they are not only the voice of the children, but the voice of the foster parent too.

(Foster Parent #2) I get a lot of help from my mother babysitting and transporting the kids. My kids are also one of my greatest supports. They share their lives, stuff, and help kids coming into our home feel welcome. When we need DHS support, we get it. We also get a lot of support from our family, and church provides us a social support network.



Are there any supports for foster parents you would like to start and/or expand?

(Certifier) I would love to see a local foster parent association, an expansion of events for foster parents, and a wider volunteer base for things like driving kids to visits and office buddies to keep kids company as they sit in our office awaiting placement. Additional supports are needed for daycare, and parents need a resource to help locate appropriate daycare providers as there are few providers in the county. I would also like to start a mentor list for foster parents.

How are foster parents recruited in Baker County? Are there any efforts and/or plans being explored to boost recruitment?

(Certifier) We put up posters in the community and have had informational booths at various local events. We've had coffee house events where people can learn more about fostering. Because word of mouth is huge, we try to actively support current foster parents as much as possible. We've done some advertising, and coordinated a foster child art show that was featured in the local newspaper. Past recruitment events haven't been really successful. In a small community, there is a limited pool of people to draw from. People also tend to think about fostering for a year or more before they make the decision to become one. A few new families have come forward recently. I would like to do more outreach to local churches.

Is there anything you think would help the relationship between parents and foster parents?

(Parent #1) Communication and understanding. Not all parents are awful. Some might be rude and hateful in the beginning, but they won't always be that way.

(Parent #2) After parents have made some progress, it would be nice if there could be more leeway in communications between parents and foster parents.

If you could change one thing about how DHS works with foster parents, what would it be and why?

(Parent #2) DHS should immediately communicate with foster parents if there is even an inkling that the direction of a case may change. This will help everyone be on the same page.

(Foster Parent #2) It would be great to see caseworkers who were not overwhelmed. They are always dealing with the priority of that day, which means someone is getting shuffled back. It's the reality of the agency. In the last five years, we've had six different caseworkers. We basically have to start over with each new caseworker.

(Foster Parent #1) It's really helpful for foster parents to meet the parents. It's really hard to see a baby

going through withdrawals or bringing a malnourished baby back to life. Meeting the mom lets you see she is human and that you both want good things for the child.

(Foster Youth) I had a pretty good experience in foster care. My caseworker was perfect!

The Panel held its final meeting on April 18, 2018. During this meeting, the Panel discussed barriers that may be interfering with foster parents understanding how the system works, how to effectively operate within that system, and how to build a network of support. Among the barriers identified were:

- DHS policies and procedures are very black and white, and workers don't always have the time to help foster parents navigate the inevitable gray areas that come up as foster parents try to follow those standards/expectations.
- DHS does not adequately train foster parents on how the system works. It's hard for foster parents to keep up with changes, and foster parents sometimes fear asking questions.
- There is not currently a position within DHS whose sole purpose is to connect foster parents with supports and build volunteer networks.
- Foster parents need to be more supported through transitions like when a child leaves their care.
- The community needs more information about ways they can help the system.
- Foster parents who go inactive are often overlooked for what contributions they could potentially continue making.

Panel members discussed how sometimes the words of a peer who has been in your shoes can resonate more than the advice of an authority figure, particularly in work as complex and emotional as fostering children. They talked about the potential benefits of using experienced foster parents to educate and mentor new foster families, how foster parents who come to Court and CRB reviews tend to better understand how the system works, and how

the wider community could be utilized to both recruit and support foster families. With this in mind, the Panel formed their recommendations to improve local child welfare policies and practices related to foster parent recruitment, support, and retention.

Panel Recommendations

1. DHS incorporate an interview of experienced current or former foster parents into the *Foundations* training for new foster parents.
2. DHS periodically bring in experienced current or former foster parents to provide a relaxed and informal question and answer session for newer foster parents.
3. DHS identify ways community members can help recruit and support foster parents.
4. CRB and the Oregon Judicial Department's Juvenile Court Improvement Program (JCIP) develop a video and/or other training material to help foster parents understand the dependency process.
5. During visits to the foster home, CASA have a discussion with the foster parents in order to thoroughly assess how the child is doing.

AREA OF FOCUS

Foster parent recruitment, support, and retention.

PANEL MEMBERS

Former Foster Youth (3)

Former DHS Parent Client (1)

Foster Parent (1)

Citizen Review Board

Jan Nieberlein, Board Member

Joy Jorgensen, Board Member

Walt Gullett, Field Manager

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Suzy Brewster, CASA

Michaela Sektnan, CASA

Julie Gilman, Executive Director

Social Service Organization

Joan Jones, Principal Youth Advisor,
Independent Living Program,
Community Services Consortium

Faith Community

Claudette Beckwith, Every Child
Steering Committee, Love INC of
Benton County

Kim Simmons, Every Child Steering
Committee, Love INC of Benton
County

Department of Human Services

Mayrean Carter, Program Manager

Court

Honorable Daniel R. Murphy, Presiding
Judge, Linn County Circuit Court

Attorneys

Ryan Phillips, Assistant Attorney
General, Department of Justice
Melissa Riddell, Public Defender

Linn County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Linn County is a mostly rural county in Oregon's Willamette Valley with a population of 116,672 (2010 Census). The county spans 2,309 square miles, and the city of Albany is the county seat. The economy is supported primarily through wood products, agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.

The Linn County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel included 18 members representing local foster youth, former DHS parent clients, foster parents, the CRB, CASA, faith community, social service organizations, child welfare, the Court, the Attorney General's Office, and attorneys representing parents and children in dependency cases.

Public Forum

Before their first meeting, the Panel hosted a public forum where members of the public were invited to learn more about the local child welfare system, and to suggest issues the Panel should consider for its area of focus in the coming year. The public forum was held on Thursday, October 5, 2017 from 6—7:30 PM at the Linn-Benton Community College, Albany Campus.

Forum attendees heard from five local speakers: two former foster youth, a former DHS parent client, an Independent Living Program provider, and a DHS Program Manager. The speakers talked about common misconceptions people have about foster care, opportunities and challenges facing the local child welfare system, ways that system is achieving its goals, and where it might need to improve. Some of the local challenges identified were:

- The county is facing foster placement shortages at all levels;
- Excessive caseloads and worker turnover makes it difficult for caseworkers to build solid connections with children;
- Transitional housing is needed for parents who complete residential drug and alcohol treatment;
- Foster youth need more information about higher education opportunities and scholarships; and
- Our society in general needs more in-person interaction.

The speakers identified opportunities in resources that were coming to Linn County in the near future. Lebanon is getting a residential drug treatment facility, and Love INC of Benton County will be implementing the Every Child initiative in both Benton and Linn counties. [Every Child](#) is a statewide initiative to create easy *on ramps*



Panel Meetings

The Linn County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel held its first meeting on December 12, 2017 where panel members selected two separate, but often related, areas of focus: 1) foster parent recruitment, support, and retention; and 2) DHS worker retention. The Panel also identified a list of additional subject matter experts they wanted to hear from, and research and data they wanted to collect.

FIRST Area of Focus: Foster Parent Recruitment, Support, and Retention

for people to help children in foster care and support the caseworkers who serve them. The initiative is currently operating in 13 counties and hopes to be in every Oregon county by 2022. In early 2017, DHS and two highly motivated and persuasive local foster parents successfully lobbied Every Child to come to Linn and Benton counties earlier than planned to address the foster placement shortage crisis.

At their second meeting on March 14, 2018, the Panel had the opportunity to interview five individuals with expertise in the Panel's first area of focus—foster parent recruitment, support, and retention. They included a local foster parent, two members of the Every Child Steering Committee, a DHS Certifier, and the Project Manager of DHS' statewide Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, Support, and Training Project. Below are summarized highlights from those interviews.

Public forum attendees then participated in a group activity to generate a list of ideas for the Panel to consider for its area of focus. The ideas suggested were:

Can you give a sense of how great the need is for additional foster homes in Linn County?

(Certifier) It feels like the number of foster homes in Linn County are increasing. We do a really good job getting kids placed with relatives. Also, we've been increasing the frequency we offer the orientation training to people considering fostering. Surprisingly, these additional trainings have not appeared to result in increases to the number of people filling out applications to become foster parents. A three-group panel is looking into where we're losing these prospective foster parents and why.

If you met someone who was considering becoming a foster parent, what advice would you give them?

(Foster Parent) Talk to other foster parents. Read books and websites. Make sure you have a network of people to provide emotion support, tangible support, and respite. It's important for people who are considering fostering to sit down and really think

- Improving caseworker training, recognition, and professional development;
- Continuity of relationships between caseworkers and children;
- Retention of workers and accountability;
- Supporting foster parents to support children;
- An orientation video for parents who have had their children removed from their care;
- More thorough evaluation of parents before their children are returned to their care;
- Health coverage continuity when children are moved from one county to another;
- Fun activities for children to help them adjust to transitions; and
- A CASA for every child in foster care.

about what they are getting into. They need to show the child love and support. They need to be the steady person in that child's life. Consider if it will work for your family because when you open your home to foster a child, you're opening it to the entire dependency system.

Thinking of the foster parents you've worked with, what qualities and/or approaches to fostering have you appreciated?

(Certifier) I appreciate foster parents who communicate well. Those that can advocate for a child but at the same time work cooperatively. The system in general tries to prepare them for what they will experience, but foster parents have a variety of styles and skill levels. Matching children to the right foster parents is important.

When you started fostering, you probably had certain expectations. What is similar to how you thought it would be and what is different?

(Foster Parent) We were really naive. We thought because we had room, a home, and love, it would be fine. It wasn't. It's good now, but it's been ten years. Foster parents need more information to understand where a kid is coming from. They need support in the form of respite from the get go. In the beginning, we didn't know anybody. We had no support system.

Do you receive any help or supports that are particularly helpful to you as a foster parent?

(Foster Parent) It helps that my best friend is now a foster parent and there are several families in my church who foster. We have comradery. It would really help foster families if respite were more available. Foster parent/respite provider mix and mingle events are wonderful. It helps to have a network of people to talk to. Child care to attend trainings would increase participation.

What is Love INC of Benton County and what about the Every Child initiative influenced you to take a leadership role in bringing it to Benton and Linn counties?



(Every Child Representative) With the help of nearly 50 partner churches and about 1,500 volunteers, Love INC of Benton County offers more than a dozen 'Gap Ministries' to help fill gaps in services and resources in the community that are not currently or sufficiently being met. Even before Every Child considered coming here, there was already a community workgroup in Benton County looking at what things Embrace Oregon (the Portland metro area nonprofit on which Every Child is based) was doing that could be started locally. This workgroup then rolled into the Every Child Steering Committee. Love INC of Benton County was selected as the backbone community program to manage Every Child locally because it already had an infrastructure of providing services like transportation, housing, and clothing in the community.

Where are Benton and Linn counties in the planning of Every Child?

(Every Child Representative) Every Child will officially launch in Benton County next week and in Linn County in January (2018). Every county is able to tailor Every Child to its own needs, and other counties within the Every Child network are really good at supporting each other. In the last three months, even before we officially launched, we received twelve foster and adoption inquires through our website. Additionally, since January 2017, 186 people have volunteered locally. We currently have a visitation room initiative where local churches are fixing up visitation rooms within the DHS offices. Local churches also sponsor regular foster parent night out events in partnership with DHS. We've organized a workshop for local

foster parents, and people in the community are preparing welcome boxes for children entering foster care (see [article](#) in Corvallis Gazette-Times). It takes time to build, but once we're fully implemented, we'd like to have services like 'adopt a foster family,' 'coffee house respite mix and mingles,' and 'stopping by and bringing a meal' in addition to the more traditional services coordinated by Every Child.

(DHS Program Manager) Over the years, there has been multiple people and organizations who have offered support to DHS in the form of making over visit rooms and the like. What is exciting and different about Every Child is that it promises to be sustained support over time. The sustainability piece has always been missing.

What do you do to help keep foster parents motivated to keep fostering despite the challenges?

(Certifier) We try to be really honest about the demands of fostering. We also try to respond to calls and emails from foster parents promptly. We make sure to check-in on all new placements as well as check-in with a family when a child leaves. We ask whether they are getting enough self-care. Foster parent night out events also help. These happen in Benton County the third Saturday of every month with summers off.

Can you describe your ideal vision for Every Child in three years?

(Every Child Representative) The hope is that we can rally all sorts of support from the community.

What motivates you to continue fostering?

(Foster Parent) The kids! They are frustrating and wonderful at the same time.

The Panel held its third meeting on March 8, 2018. Based on information gathered from the interviews, Panel members decided to focus their attention on helping foster parents build a network of support. They discussed barriers that may be interfering with this, including:

The kids! They are frustrating and wonderful at the same time.

- foster parent on what motivates her to continue fostering

- Lack of time—caseworkers have large caseloads and foster families are typically super busy;
- DHS worker turnover;
- Inconsistencies in how workers interpret policies and rules;
- Responsiveness of workers to questions from foster parents;
- Foster parents not knowing what supports are available;
- Not having a local foster parent association;
- Foster parents that get so frustrated, they're just done and no longer open to help or support;
- Foster youth needing support from each other—time to talk without adults;
- Foster parent/respite provider mix and mingle events are not yet happening locally;
- Unrealistic expectations among prospective and new foster parents leads to them ultimately backing away from it.

Panel members discussed the value of experienced foster parents mentoring prospective and new foster parents, and foster parents' need for one on one support and crisis intervention after business hours. A foster parent on the panel said she had once tried calling the Foster Parent Support Line (211info) after hours and that it didn't work for her. With this in mind, the Panel formed two recommendations to improve child welfare policies and practices related to foster parent recruitment, support, and retention:

- DHS pair prospective and new foster parents with an experienced foster parent for mentoring and comradery.

- DHS have a staff person on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, dedicated to returning calls from foster parents, triaging them, and providing assistance as needed.



SECOND Area of Focus: DHS Worker Retention

The Panel held its final meeting on April 26, 2018 where members had the opportunity to interview three DHS employees with expertise in the Panel’s second area of focus—DHS worker retention. They included an Addiction Recovery Team worker with over ten years of child welfare experience in both the child protective services and permanency units; a permanency worker with about two years of experience; and an experienced child protective services worker in a newly created Mentoring, Assisting, and Promoting Success (MAPS) position designed to mentor workers less than a year on the job. Below are summarized highlights from the interviews. All three speakers answered each question, therefore, the summaries are compilations of all their answers.

When you started working for DHS, you probably had certain expectations. What is similar to how you thought it would be and what is different?

I expected to be working with families and that it would sometimes be frustrating and emotional. I didn’t expect how much redundant paperwork there would be, and how much time this would take away from engaging families. I didn’t expect how high the

caseloads would be; the staff turnover, particularly in the child protective services unit; the impact on my personal life; the lack of support from central office; and the negativity in office culture, management, and between the units.

What aspects of the caseworker position tend to be the most satisfying or rewarding? What aspects cause the most frustration?

The most satisfying parts of the caseworker position are seeing progress of clients; interviewing kids and families; and knowing that, at the end of the day, I kept a child safe. I like the strong sense of comradery and building relationships with families. The most frustrating aspects of the job are when the Oregon Safety Model conflicts with what is legally required; staff turnover; supervisors not being present in the office during business hours and after 5 PM because they’re off dealing with the [work] crisis of that day; the tiered system of assigning cases; [lack of] utility of the citizen review board process; and working with some particularly difficult service providers in the community where the level of responsiveness you get depends on who you know.

What help or supports are available to caseworkers both locally and statewide?

Statewide, we have the Employee Assistance Program. Locally, we have two new MAPS positions who are starting to mentor new child protective services workers less than a year on the job. We also have consultants assigned to the district, but their guidance is sometimes not as helpful as an experienced worker in the branch. Recently, we’ve been using support staff to streamline processes with court forms, and we have one Case Aid position and were just allocated another to offload some tasks traditionally done by caseworkers.

What forms of recognition or appreciation do caseworkers receive?

Locally, a staff person is recognized each month and there are also quarterly and annual district service

awards. Every Child comes in monthly now too. They set up a permanent coffee station in the office, which is wonderful because we live on coffee here. Workers would like more acknowledgement from supervisors and outside agencies. One issue is that funds for staff recognition often come from either staff fundraisers or out of the pockets of management. We are in the process of applying for a grant to fund some of these recognition events.

What are two changes that you think would have an immediate positive impact on caseworkers' job satisfaction and retention? If possible, please try to make one of these cost neutral.

Lower caseloads would give staff the ability to manage their caseload and improve safety for kids. It might also help if caseworkers periodically had an opportunity to 'clear' their caseloads. Making new workers feel welcome is also really important.

It would help if DHS central office regularly sent representatives to the branches to talk to all caseworkers, not just selected ones. Timothy Sinatra, DHS' Director of Transformational Change, recently visited the Albany office and it was great. Even the more disgruntled workers left that meeting feeling positive. These kinds of meetings help eliminate fear of central office. It was also nice that someone from Human Resources visited the branch and shadowed a caseworker for a day. This helps central office understand the realities of casework today, not just how things were when they were caseworkers.

Following the interviews, Panel members worked in small groups to identify recommendations to improve worker retention. Discussion focused on ways to reduce workload, improve caseworker access to supervisors for support and leadership, and worker recognition.

Panel Recommendations

FIRST Area of Focus: Foster Parent Recruitment, Support, and Retention

1. DHS pair prospective and new foster parents with an experienced foster parent for mentoring and comradery.
2. DHS have a staff person on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, dedicated to returning calls from foster parents, triaging them, and providing assistance as needed.

SECOND Area of Focus: DHS Worker Retention

3. DHS streamline paperwork and reduce redundancy—focus on low hanging fruit.
4. DHS ensure a supervisor is present in the office and available to workers for support and required staffings.
5. DHS offer additional training to supervisors on quality team leadership.
6. Stakeholders take opportunities to recognize good casework.

AREA OF FOCUS

Serving current and former foster youth age 18 to 21 and beyond.

PANEL MEMBERS

Former Foster Youth (2)

Parent Mentor and Former DHS Parent Client (1)

Foster Parent (2)

Citizen Review Board

Karen Bailey, Board Member
Kate Kavanagh, Board Member
Tony Richoux, Board Member
Alida Royse, Board Member
Angela Donley, Board Member
Tiffany Lamberth, Support Staff
David Smith, Field Manager

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Barbara Mutnick, CASA
Sandra Morris, CASA
Deborah Sakamoto, Program Director

Community Service Organization

Beth Burns, Peer Executive Director
Suzan Huntington, President and CEO,
Boys and Girls Aid

Department of Human Services

Sarah Walker, Certification and
Adoption Program Manager

Court

Neal Japport, Deputy Trial Court
Administrator

Attorneys

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Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Multnomah County is Oregon's most populous county. While it spans just 466 square miles, it is home to 735,334 people (2010 Census). The county seat is in Portland, the state's largest city. The economy is supported primarily through manufacturing, transportation, wholesale and retail trade, and tourism.

The Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel included 22 members representing local foster youth, former DHS parent clients, parent mentors, foster parents, the CRB, CASA, community service organizations, child welfare, the Court, the District Attorney's Office, and attorneys representing parents and children in dependency cases.

Youth Input Event

Before their first meeting, the Panel hosted a youth input event where current and former foster youth, their Independent Living Program providers, and youth and staff members of Oregon Foster Youth Connections were invited to identify issues the Panel should consider for its area of focus. The event was held on Wednesday, October 11, 2017 from 3:30—5 PM at New Avenues for Youth in Portland. Attendees were asked a series of questions during the event. Below are summarized highlights from their answers.

What are some common misconceptions you think people have about foster care?

- *Everything!*
- *The child did something to get into foster care.*
- *It is the youth's fault if they move from foster home to foster home when, in reality, many moves are due to children not being appropriately matched to foster parents or foster parents not being adequately prepared for behaviors resulting from the child's trauma.*
- *Teens don't want to be or cannot be adopted. They can and are!*
- *There is a single, agreed upon conception of what foster care looks like. In reality, fostering can look different for older youth.*

If you could change one policy or practice (large or small) in the foster system, what would it be and why?

- *I would love to see caseworkers take the time to get to know youth, even if they will only have the case for a few weeks, so that the information can get passed on to the next caseworker.*
- *Trauma training for everyone who interacts with youth, including foster parents. The trauma training needs to be 'real,' not just 'infused' into everything. They need to learn how trauma can look different in teens and adults. Also, caseworkers need to let foster parents know what behaviors they might see because of a youth's trauma, and do some planning around what to do when these behaviors occur.*
- *DHS' Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) unit needs to be expanded as there are lots of Native American children who are on a waitlist to get a culturally specific worker. There is also only one certified ICWA foster placement in Multnomah County.*
- *Youth should not be forced to participate in the religious and cultural activities of their foster parents. LGBTQI2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersexual, and 2-Spirited) youth are different and don't need to be more closely monitored because of these differences. They should be allowed to be themselves without judgment.*
- *Oregon Foster Youth Connection convened 31 current and former foster youth from across the state to develop its [2016 Policy Recommendations](#).*

What is something you would want the CAPTA Citizen Review Panel to know about the foster system?

Fostering needs to be incentivized. There is a serious shortage of foster homes which leads to emergency placements. Foster parents aren't getting the respect that they should. Caseworkers aren't being honest with foster parents about what behaviors they might see from a youth. Foster parents don't know what they should be doing with children placed with them on a short-term emergency basis. Should they be making needed medical appointments? Getting them signed up for school? Someone should be looking at whether DHS is following their own mission. When you take a youth out of a home and do not have a safe place for them to go, you are not functioning to your mission.



Panel Meetings

The Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel held its first meeting on October 12, 2017 where panel members selected serving current and former foster youth age 18 to 21 and beyond as its area of focus. Panel members were particularly concerned about vulnerability to homelessness among youth who choose to exit foster care early. In Oregon, youth can choose to remain in foster care until age 21. However, youth who decide to exit foster care after they turn 18 cannot re-enter foster care in an emergency. The Panel was unsure whether this was due to state law or DHS policy, and wanted information about what other services were available to these youth.

A member of the Panel shared a particularly poignant experience she had as the former CASA of a young woman who had been in foster care. The young woman had called her to come to the hospital and be with her as she gave birth to her first child. The CASA said that while she was honored to have received this call, as she sat in the delivery room, she couldn't help feeling sadness that SHE was the person witnessing this momentous event in this young woman's life.

By the end of the meeting, the Panel identified a list of subject matter experts they wanted to hear from, and research and data they wanted to collect.

At their second meeting on December 14, 2017, the Panel reviewed the collected research and data:

- From July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017, 105 foster youth age 18 or older exited care in

Multnomah County. Of these youth, 26% left at age 18 and another 18% left at age 19. Statewide, these percentages are 46% at 18 and another 19% at 19 (out of a total of 360 foster youth).

- According to National Youth in Transition Data for Oregon for Federal Fiscal Year 2016, 16% of foster youth age 19 experienced homelessness in the last two years.
- State law (ORS 418.027) appears to allow foster youth who close their case after they turn 18 to re-enter foster care up to age 21. DHS policy does not currently allow this.
- 31 other states allow these youth to re-enter foster care (almost all until their 21st birthday).
- Except for Vermont (to age 22), there doesn't appear to be any states that continue foster care beyond age 21.
- State law (ORS 419B.337(7)) sets certain conditions that have to be met before a court can dismiss DHS custody. One of those is a finding that the ward has safe and stable housing and is unlikely to become homeless as a result of the dismissal.



Panel members then had the opportunity to interview five individuals with expertise in serving older youth in foster care. They included a foster youth, a foster parent experienced in fostering older youth, a supervisor and a caseworker from Multnomah County DHS' Teen Unit, and the statewide DHS Foster Care and Youth Transitions Program Manager. Below are summarized highlights from those interviews.

If you met someone who was considering fostering older youth, what advice would you give them?

(Foster Parent) It is important to support foster youth, not try to change them. Also, anytime a foster parent can engage with their foster child's biological family, they should. Many times, foster youth will re-engage with biological family anyway. For someone thinking about fostering older youth, go ahead. You will learn how to build a relationship with them as you go.

Are there any differences between being in foster care as a young adult (18 and over) and being in foster care as a 16 or 17 year old?

(Foster Youth) There aren't a lot of regular foster family placements for you above 18. We need to work with foster families on the needs of transition-aged youth. Foster youth may not need to have meals cooked for them, but they might need someone to go with them on a college tour or accompany them to a complicated medical appointment. Many foster youth are more in need of a guide or mentor than a caretaker. Also, foster youth need people in their life who will not go away when they turn 21 and the foster payments stop.

(Program Manager) When Oregon extended the option of continuing in foster care to age 21, it took the model for kids 0 to 18 and stretched it to age 21. Because most foster youth age 18 to 21 need guidance rather than day-to-day care, a new model is needed that allows foster parents to support these youth without being held accountable for all youth decisions.

Have you stayed in contact with any of the youth you fostered (foster parent) any of your former foster parents (foster youth)?

(Foster Parent) They're all still coming back. They come for holidays and bring their kids. It is comfortable, not something that is forced.

(Foster Youth) No. I was never placed for permanency. It was always like 'where can we put you until you get old enough to live on your own.' Other times, I was just homeless.

What services/resources are available specifically for older youth in foster care?

- *Multnomah County has three contracted Independent Living Program (ILP) providers: New Avenues for Youth (NAFY), Impact NW, and Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA). Most of ILP services are focused on skill building but NAFY has recently expanded its services to active case management. They also have other extended programming including but not limited to counseling, GED prep, college connection, job training, employment assistance, and housing.*
- *Portland Community College Fostering Success program provides a support network and individual coaching to enable students who have experienced foster care to successfully complete career and educational goals.*
- *Oregon Foster Youth Connection is a statewide, youth led, advocacy group of current and former foster youth between 14 and 25 years of age.*
- *Youth who age out of foster care remain eligible for medical insurance until they turn 26.*
- *The Independent Living Housing Subsidy Program provides \$795 per month for youth 16 or older in DHS custody to live independently for up to three years until they turn 21.*
- *Chafee Housing provides up to \$795 per month for former foster youth to live independently for a maximum of \$7,000.*
- *The Chafee Education and Training Grant provides youth up to \$5,000 per academic year for college, university, or training program expenses.*
- *DHS partners with Home Forward, a provider of affordable housing and related supports, to continue providing some case management for youth after they leave ILP. Home Forward's Portland YouthBuilders (PYB) is a program where low income youth age 17-24 are paid to finish school, learn a trade, and plan for their future. Also through Home Forward, Multnomah County DHS has access to 75 Section 8 rent assistance vouchers for families and 25 vouchers for youth.*

Can a youth who leaves foster care after turning 18 voluntarily re-enter foster care?

(Program Manager) Currently, youth who leave foster care after turning 18 cannot re-enter foster care per DHS policy. Youth who leave can sign up for ILP services, the Chafee Education and Training Grant, and housing assistance through the Independent Living Housing Subsidy Program or Chafee Housing. Allowing youth age 18 to 21 to re-enter foster care would have a significant impact on current funding and resource capacity (foster parents, caseworkers, etc). Additionally, what youth say they want needs to be looked at. Do they continue to want paid people in their life or to start finding people who want to be involved because of who they (the youth) are? Not every re-entry needs to be into a foster home.

What techniques do caseworkers use to persuade youth to remain in foster care until they turn 21?

(Caseworker and Supervisor) Caseworkers can often draw youth out with things that interest them like driver education. They can emphasize how this will help the youth later. They can talk to youth about all their options and how the goal is to age out successfully. Doing some groundwork can also help. For example, caseworkers can share their concerns with the youth. They can talk to the youth about what the judge is going to want to see in respect to transition planning at the next hearing. They can refer youth to appropriate screenings for supports like the Independent Living Housing Subsidy Program or Chafee Housing.

Are there any efforts to allow youth to remain in foster care beyond age 21?

(Program Manager) I think extending foster care to beyond age 21 would be a steep ask in Oregon. There were some legislators against extending it from age 18 to 21. Instead, there needs to be a more general building of capacity for young people. More and more people in the community are learning and talking about this. Oregon's governor is also supportive. A legislative concept would be needed to request additional funding from the Oregon Legislature to build that capacity.



In what ways does the system do a good job preparing and supporting foster youth to live independently? Where does it need to improve?

(Foster Parent) It seems as though foster youth need a more natural transition to independence. Having so many paid people in their life who are gone after they exit care is not natural. Foster youth need more people they can come back to for support after their case closes.

(Foster Youth) I was not prepared to live independently. When I was 17, I was living in a cockroach infested place with my mattress on the floor and a box for all my stuff. My case was in another county, and my ILP workers were generally pretty young. They had good intentions but were more like friends. They helped me acquire things like silverware and, when I had time to attend ILP classes, I learned about taxes, knife safety, chopping up fruit, and navigating health insurance. I didn't have a lot of time for classes because I was working.

Do you receive any help or supports that are particularly helpful?

(Foster Parent) The youth I foster have a mentor through an organization that is also creating a leadership program. My experience with ILP is negative. It seems there's a lot of going out for coffee. It would be better if there were more group activities/classes. Also, I'm surprised at all the available services for foster youth that I've heard today. How are foster parents supposed to know all the services and resources that are available? I have

the notebook they give foster parents, but I haven't been involved with things as much as before. It seems you only find out about what is available when you have a youth at risk. Maybe this is caused by so many worker changes.

(Foster Youth) I needed someone checking on me and ILP was the only one that did. It seems that you don't get any help unless you're totally helpless. When I wanted information on filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), I was advised I could Google it. With another thing, I was told that Boys and Girls Aid might be able to help and that I should go find out. It seems that if you're a smart youth, you're expected to be able to perform as a smart adult.

Why do you think so many youth choose to leave foster care early (before age 21)?

(Foster Parent) They leave because they do not want DHS and others in their business anymore. There are so many people in their life calling the shots. When I was young, I just had my parents. Also, don't forget, they remember who took them away from their parents. It would be difficult for a youth to decide to stay with a foster family after age 18 unless the youth has a relationship with that family.

(Foster Youth) As we're trying to improve services, it's important to remember that no part of it is what a child would want for themselves. By the time foster youth reach 18, they just want this traumatic thing to end. It's a trauma response. They don't want anyone casting judgment on how they live their life. Foster youth know that you will go away. They want you to go away! But, they also don't want to be left alone. Also, I want a home, not a transition. I don't want to live with five other young people while trying to meet my hours of productive work required by ILP.

(Foster Youth) There are people out there who are invested in fostering. When Every Child posted a message stating that I needed a place to stay, 200 people responded. It would be nice if there was a program that connected current and former foster youth with people in their community who were willing to help them with various tasks – like an aunt or uncle would.

The Panel held its final meeting on February 15, 2018. Based on the information gathered from the interviews, Panel members decided to focus their attention broadly on improving Oregon’s current model for serving foster youth age 18 to 21. They discussed concerns with the current model, including:

- Foster youth not getting to experience early adulthood with a supportive adult;
- The current rules for foster parents not differentiating between children and young adults;
- Lack of training and support for foster parents and caseworkers;
- Rules in foster homes not always being age appropriate;
- The need to appropriately match youth and foster homes because youth can end up homeless if an appropriate fit cannot be found or if the youth *refuses service*;
- That a different strategy is needed for recruiting foster parents for youth age 18 to 21;
- DHS liability;
- Foster youth age 18 to 21 lacking clarity on whether or not they can provide their own consent for things like surgery and out of state travel;
- There is not a process for changing the legal parties to the case after a child becomes an adult; and
- Services do not match the needs of specific youth—one size does not fit all.

One Panel member said that her community service organization has a number of elderly volunteers who could not foster in the traditional sense, but could potentially be wonderful foster providers for youth age 18 to 21 under a model of foster parent as mentor rather than caretaker. New Avenues for Youth and Bridge Meadows have been exploring these kinds of opportunities for intergenerational care and support through its [New Meadows Program](#)

for transition age foster youth.

With all this in mind, the Panel formed their recommendations to improve child welfare policies and practices related to serving current and former foster youth age 18 to 21 and beyond.

Panel Recommendations

1. DHS convene a multi-disciplinary task force to conduct a comprehensive review of policies for youth age 18 to 21. Ensure the task force has staff to coordinate the meetings and work.
2. DHS develop a mentor program for youth based on the parent mentor model.
3. DHS develop separate certification, training, and service rules and standards for foster parents of youth age 18 to 21.
4. CRB establish a local board that specializes in reviewing the cases of youth in foster care.

Epilogue

While the Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel was composed entirely of community members and child welfare system professionals within the Portland metropolitan area, it is worth noting that their research and ultimately their recommendations are ambitious and statewide in scope. This came out of genuine concern Panel members had for youth they were seeing exit the foster system with insufficient supports and safety nets in place. Youth age 18 to 21 in foster care have responsibilities, stressors, risks, and needs that are different from their younger counterparts. And there was general consensus among Panel members that statewide child welfare policies and practices related to serving this population need to be approached separately in order to give foster youth age 18 to 21 the priority and individualized attention they need and deserve. As one Panel member commented, “My hope is that this is a platform for developing a more developmentally appropriate system for our older youth in care.”

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