



National Association of Public
Child Welfare Administrators

an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association

How States are Implementing the Fostering Connections Act

Missouri's At-risk Children

In the calendar year 2008, the Missouri Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline Unit (CANHU) received 50,565 reports of child maltreatment, involving 75,781 children. Of those children 53,173 had one report, 7,292 children had more than one report and 6,732 children were involved in incidents that were substantiated.¹ During that same time period there were 27,024 reports involving 38,896 children that were assigned to the Family Assessment approach. Of the Family Assessment children 5,320 children had a conclusion of services needed, 4,447 of those determined to be in need were linked to services within 30 days of the report, and families of 896 were offered but declined services.²

In SFY 05 there were a total of 17,114 children in state custody for the entire year. This was reduced to 15,204 in SFY2007.³ The number of children in out-of-home care (licensed foster homes, group homes and residential settings and approved relative homes) has steadily decreased from a high of 12,521 in May 2002 to 9,356 in July 2007. The decreasing numbers are attributed to a number of factors including the following:

- There has been a decline in the number of children involved in maltreatment incidents reducing the total population served. This is attributed to Family-Centered Services (FCS) provided to families who seek help voluntarily as well as those under investigations or with children in placement.
- Placements are averted with alternative services. Missouri's Intensive-In-Home Service (IIHS) initiative offers families intensive short term, home based, crisis intervention services enabling them to remain safely together. (This program is considered a national model and has been used by researchers to show the efficacy of this approach).⁴
- The number of children exiting foster care every year has continually exceeded the number entering foster care. Contributing to this positive exit statistic are decreased lengths of stay for children with both reunification and adoption goals and the alternative permanency option offered through the Missouri Legal Guardianship Subsidy Program. All permanency goals are supported by FCS and IIHS⁵

Decreasing the number in foster care is not sufficient unless they are in safe and permanent environments. In this regard Missouri has also done well. The percent of children with repeat maltreatment after reunification has declined from 1.72 in first quarter of 2002 to .16 in the fourth quarter of 2007. Missouri is also doing better than the federal standard for the number of children re-entering care. Re-entry rates decreased from 11.80 percent in the first quarter of 2003 to 7.92 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007. Though finalized adoptions are moved forward in a timely manner, over a three year period these have reached a plateau⁶ as indicated by the following: 2005 1,200, FY 2006 1,150 and in FY 2007 1,150.⁷ It is laudable that Missouri has been able to reduce its foster care population and at the same time steadily reduce the number of children in residential settings by placing these children in more family like settings.

Missouri's Budget Landscape

Missouri faces serious economic challenges. Training funds were reduced and the state agency is exploring more cost effective ways to complete training for staff utilizing technology. On the whole, the Department of Social Services, Children's Division budget was not cut drastically in the legislative session that ended in May 2009. Subsequent state revenues, however, are much less than originally expected. All state executive departments, including the Children's Division must identify ways to meet reduction targets. Every position other than front line workers and supervisors is carefully reviewed prior to filling the vacancy. Twenty-eight state positions were lost, with their functions being eliminated or absorbed. The agency is in its final phase of achieving national accreditation through the Council on Accreditation (COA). To achieve this honor, each of the state's 45 judicial circuit offices must demonstrate that its policies, practices, programs and procedures are in compliance with the best child welfare practice standards. The Children's Division hopes to hear by November of this year, that the entire state has met COA standards. Currently 44

circuits have been successful, with the last remaining circuit awaiting their final report from COA. No cuts or spending restrictions have affected accreditation efforts or standing.

P.L. 110-351 State Options

Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) will be implemented. In March, 2009, Missouri submitted a IV-E plan amendment seeking to have the program retroactive to January 1, 2009. The state is awaiting approval of this plan. Through state legislation that became effective on August 28, 1999, Missouri has a state guardianship program that is funded entirely by state appropriations. Guardianship subsidy is provided in the same manner as the adoption subsidy program which is outlined in state law. It has provided legal permanence for children who would otherwise be in foster care. The number of children receiving guardianship continues to rise as many relatives who have children placed in their home are choosing the guardianship option for permanency. (Parenthetically, this also contributes to the decline in foster care).⁸ The state guardianship is very similar to the federal program. It did not have the six month timeframe for the living arrangement, but Missouri staff believe that families that have had children with them six months or more under the Missouri's program will be eligible for IV-E guardianship as of January 1, 2009. No relative foster care licensing waivers are currently being utilized; however, non-safety requirements are being reviewed to determine if waivers should be allowed. Current policy required updates to include the background screening and completion of licensing activities for relative guardians. We anticipate a positive impact to the budget.

Support to eligible young adults aged 19, 20, or 21 is already done in Missouri. A youth may stay in care until 21, if the youth wants it, the family team makes a recommendation to the court, and the court is in agreement. No amendment to the state plan will be necessary for foster care.

Support to eligible youth who exit care to guardianship or adoption after age 16 is a standard practice in Missouri until the youth reaches the age of 18. Guardianship stops at 18 because the youth is legally considered an adult. Adoptions support also terminates at age 18, unless there is an extraordinary condition, then it may continue on a year by year basis to age 21. Youth are eligible for adoption assistance to age 21 when there is a documented medical, mental health or dental condition that requires continuation of the agreement.

Missouri Tribes

There are no federally recognized tribes in Missouri. But there are three multipurpose social service centers for Native Americans: Heart of America Indian Center in Kansas City; American Indian Council in St. Louis and the Southwest Missouri Indian Center in Springfield. When tribal children come to the attention of the Missouri Children's Division, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is followed and services are coordinated with the nearest Indian Center. Tribal courts have parity with juvenile/state courts and in most cases assume jurisdiction and take responsibility for the child. If the Indian Centers are unable to provide services, the tribe is still notified and engaged in all actions to ensure that child welfare services are provided with respect for Indian heritage and cultural beliefs and ICWA requirements. Tribal representation was provided on Missouri's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) committee. Missouri has no formal agreements with the Indian Centers, however, we enjoy a cooperative relationship with them for the purpose of providing services to families as well as advising on policies surrounding Native American clients.

P.L. 110-351 Mandatory Provisions

Missouri has not requested the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) delay any of the mandatory provisions.

Relative Notification is carried out in a variety of ways. The policy changes needed to meet the federal relative notification regulations were completed August 28, 2009. Additionally, Missouri House Bill 154, requires that Grandparents must be notified within three hours of the child being placed. When the decision is made to place a child out of their home, first preference is given to relatives. The Children's Division consistently places almost one fourth of all children with relatives.⁹

Education stability mandates were addressed in the Foster Care Bill of Rights that was passed in the last legislative session (Missouri House Bill 154, Foster Care Education Bill of Rights and Senate Bill 291). A workgroup that includes personnel from elementary and secondary education departments and representative from various school boards is developing policy changes that include travel to keep children in the same school district should be in place by the end of August 2009.¹⁰ Policy changes were made to allow reimbursement of foster parents for travel necessary to maintain children in the same school district they were in at time of removal.

Sibling Connections takes high priority in the hierarchy of placement options. When siblings are not placed together, the Family Support Team meetings continue to address the need to unify the siblings. This is a challenging issue. Resource families are an issue when large sibling groups come into care. Relative placements are complicated when siblings have different fathers. When siblings enter care at different times, foster parents of the child or children initially placed may not have space for the sibling. If a child has been with foster parents for nine months or longer the foster parent has preference for adoption.

Transition plan for children aging out of foster care has had extensive focus and programming in Missouri. Missouri starts working with youth at age 14 and has implemented the Federal 90 day requirement. There are different levels of transition planning which become more intensive as the youth gets older.

The Family Support Team Guide and Individualized Action Plan tool is utilized extensively in this planning. Missouri's program targets children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age or older, helping them to make the transition to self sufficiency through formal life skills training and education, training and services necessary to obtain employment. The program provides personal and emotional support to children aging out of foster care through mentors and the promoting of interactions with dedicated adults. Financial, housing counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support services are provided to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years.¹¹

In the Transitional Living Program (TLP) program a youth moves from a structured family or residential setting to group home and apartments, or lives with an advocate in order to facilitate his or her move to adult independence. Youth in TLP typically have the permanency goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). This program provides oversight and supervision to ensure the transition to self-sufficiency is successful.¹²

Missouri State Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) was established in December 1992. Each SYAB member represents all children and youth who have been or are in out-of-Home placements and is responsible for providing policy and procedural input to Children's Division administrative staff and the Juvenile Court. The SYAB also works as a network to bring back important information to each region that they represent.

Health oversight and coordination planning is underway. The Children's Division has met with the Medicaid agency to discuss how to use that agency's web-based technology. Medicaid uses the same client number as the Children's Division and could provide access but Medicaid programs are written for medical personnel and not child welfare workers. There is the need to tailor the system to provide other users with only the information that is needed and that they can use effectively. Any system built must be in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.

The Children's Division is in preliminary discussion with pediatricians in St. Louis to develop a rural and urban pilot to establish procedures to staff cases of high risk children in care.

Family Connections Grants

Missouri committed to support Children's Mercy Hospital, Family Friends Project for the Navigator program. No further update is available on the status of their application at this time. The state will help with training and referrals if the grant is awarded. If awarded the Family Friends project would be able to expand.

Family conferencing is an integral part of Missouri's practice model. In Missouri this is called Family Support Teams.

Missouri has a Family Finding federal grant in four counties in the St. Louis region. *Extreme Recruitment* is an intensive, 12-20 week, individualized recruitment effort whose strategies include preparing the child for permanency; conducting diligent searches to reconnect them with kin; and achieving permanency through general, targeted and/or child-specific recruitment and wraparound services. The program will serve 150 youth during the grant, ensuring a system of supportive adults for at least 90 percent of youth, and achieving permanency through adoption or guardianship for at least 70 percent of youth.

Family substance abuse treatment programs in Missouri are accessed through the Department of Mental Health.

Opportunities & Challenges

It will be challenging to coordinate implementation costs with current budgetary constraints. Missouri is in the process of conducting a cost analysis. It is anticipated that the health coordination program may generate some additional technology costs to coordinate systems with Medicaid. In addition, Missouri is still developing its Statewide Automated Child

Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and every time there are changes in policy or practice, corresponding changes must be made to this system. This is costly and slows things down. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is having significant impact on the state's SACWIS system at the same time the changes required for tracking the mandatory provision must be made.

Conclusion

The new federal administration has funding available. Missouri simply does not have the state fiscal match required to apply. The home visitation and family connections grants are primary examples.

Missouri would welcome any technical assistance that can be provided particularly in regard to sibling connections. The economy is slowing things down and Missouri is committed to maintaining its momentum to improve outcomes for children, youth and families it serves.¹³

¹ *Child Abuse/Neglect, Calendar Year 2008 Annual Report*. Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division. Research and Evaluation August 2009. Retrieved August 28, 2009 from <http://www.dss.mo.gov/re/pdf/can/cancy08.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ *Children' Division Appropriation Summaries*. Missouri Department of Social Services. August 15, 2008 Retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.dss.mo.gov/mis/apprpsum/children09/cd1pgap.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Children' Division Appropriation Summaries*. Missouri Department of Social Services. August 15, 2008 Retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.dss.mo.gov/mis/apprpsum/children09/cd1pgap.pdf>.

⁸ *Child Welfare Trends*. Missouri Department of Social Services. December 2007. Retrieved August 17, 2009 from http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/memos/2008/cd0804_att.pdf

⁹ *Child Welfare Trends*. Missouri Department of Social Services. December 2007. page 7 Retrieved August 17, 2009 from http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/memos/2008/cd0804_att.pdf

¹⁰ Conference call with Paula Neese, Director, Amy Martin- Program Development Specialist, and Melody Yancey, Program Manager. Children's Division August 17, 2009.

¹¹ *Children' Division Appropriation Summaries*. Missouri Department of Social Services. August 15, 2008 Retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.dss.mo.gov/mis/apprpsum/children09/cd1pgap.pdf>.

¹² *Children' Division Appropriation Summaries*. Missouri Department of Social Services. August 15, 2008 Retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.dss.mo.gov/mis/apprpsum/children09/cd1pgap.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid.