

# Illinois Citizen Review Panels

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**STATE OF ILLINOIS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**  
**CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS**  
*Report for FY 2007*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of the Citizen Review Panels**

The Illinois Citizen Review Panels are established pursuant to Section 106 (c) of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). Their function is to examine the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local agencies and where appropriate, specific cases, to evaluate the extent to which State and local child protection agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities.

In particular, the Citizen Review Panels must evaluate:

- The Illinois state CAPTA Plan and the specific areas of the child protective system which are addressed therein;
- The state's compliance with federal child protection standards and assurances set forth in the CAPTA law; and
- Any other criteria that the panels consider important to ensure the protection of children, including: 1) a review of the extent to which the State and local child protective services system is coordinated with the foster care and adoption programs; and 2) a review of child fatalities and near fatalities.

### **The Child Abuse Prevention And Treatment Act**

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was signed into law in 1974. It is one of the key pieces of federal legislation that guides child protection and is fully elaborated in U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. 5101 et seq; 42 U.S.C. 5116 et. seq.). It was reauthorized with significant amendments and additions in 1978, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996 and 2003. The Citizen Review Panels were first introduced in the CAPTA amendments of 1996 and were further delineated in the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the agency designated in Illinois to implement the provisions of CAPTA and meet requirements set out in federal law. Within DCFS, the Division of Child Protection administers many of the programs and grants required under CAPTA, including the Citizen Review Panels. CAPTA also includes a range of

requirements in other areas including community-based prevention, adoption opportunities, and assistance to abandoned infants.

### **The Development Of Citizen Review Panels In Illinois**

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services established four Citizen Review Panels to examine the policies and procedures of state and local child protective service agencies. Authorizing legislation for the Illinois Citizen Review Panels amended the Illinois Children and Family Services Act (20 ILCS 505/5) effective June 1999. According to the provisions of CAPTA, the individual states may: 1) designate one or more existing entities to satisfy the citizen review requirements; and 2) appoint volunteer members who are broadly representative of the community, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

In forming the panels, DCFS invited 4 existing advisory committees to take on citizen review activities in addition to their other interests and statutory responsibilities. Each panel includes a variety of members who have experience in working with children and families. The CFS Advisory Council and SCAN have members who represent professional organizations, child welfare agencies, volunteer associations, and concerned citizens. The Children's Justice Task Force and CDRT Executive Council have members from numerous disciplines including medicine, mental health, law, criminal justice, public health, education, social work, parent advocacy and child advocacy.

A **Citizen Review Panel Steering Committee** oversees the Citizen Review process, formulating guidelines for consistent operation of the panels and assisting with communication between the panels and DCFS. The Steering Committee includes DCFS administrators and program supervisors as well as the chair and vice-chair of each Citizen Review Panel. A list of Steering Committee members and Panel members is included in the appendix to this report.

### **Overview of 2007 Activities**

The Illinois Citizen Review Panels have continued to grow in their knowledge of the DCFS child protection system during the past year. In a response to CRP Recommendations of

2006, DCFS has responded with a letter from Deputy Director Gailyn Thomas, Division of Child Protection. Representatives from Child Protection and several other DCFS Divisions meet regularly with the panels to discuss current priorities for child safety and the protection of children from abuse and neglect.

Diane Scruggs, Vice-Chair of the SCAN panel and former Vice-Chair of the Child Death Review Executive Council, was a featured presenter at the 6<sup>th</sup> National Citizen Review Conference held in Lexington, Kentucky on May 23-35, 2007. She spoke about "Recruiting and Retaining Good Citizen Review Panel Members." Gwen Mastin, Chairperson of the SCAN panel, also attended the conference. The 2007 conference included presentations by numerous state CRP program coordinators and offered opportunities for participants to share information about successful programs, panel membership, outreach to the community, and recommendations to their child welfare agencies. Presenters from the U.S. Children's Bureau, the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services, and the American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law discussed a number of policy and planning strategies of key importance to Citizen Review Panels in their collaborative work with state child protection agencies.

Illinois Citizen Review Panels have an important role in advising DCFS and affiliated private child welfare agencies about the safety and protection of children from abuse and neglect. Members of the Illinois panels are educated on their responsibilities through the **CRP Orientation Guidebook** which delineates various citizen review responsibilities and provides members with practical information on the operation of the various committees. The members have approached their responsibilities with dedication and resolve, and they serve as an integral part of the Department's outreach to communities throughout the state.

## **PANEL ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Panel 1. Children and Family Services Advisory Council**

The Children and Family Services Advisory Council is appointed by the Governor to advise the Department of Children and Family Services on its services and programs. The Council is established in Illinois law, 20 ILCS 505, and its composition is mandated to include 17 members who serve staggered 4-year terms. Members can request renewal of their terms. The CFS Council meets quarterly in Chicago, Springfield, or by teleconference. Micki Chulick, Executive Director, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) in DeKalb serves as the chairperson. Dr. Cheryl Peterson, Citizen Review Panels Coordinator, and Ms. Bridgette Glickman, Community Liaison, Division of Communication, facilitate the meetings of the CFS Advisory Council.

#### **Meeting Dates for FY 07**

The CFS Advisory Council held meetings on the following dates:

August 18, 2006

September 28, 2006 (teleconference)

November 30, 2006 (teleconference)

January 18, 2007

April 26, 2007

#### **Focus Areas of Interest**

The CFS Advisory Council identified the following areas of DCFS policy and practice for exploration and discussion during 2007:

- DCFS services and programs for wards who are aging out of the system, experiencing problems in placement, or who are involved with the juvenile justice system. Adolescents, in particular, appear to be in need of alternative educational opportunities, life skills training, and individual mentoring to prepare for independence.
- An ongoing, structured outreach and marketing program to provide training for mandated reporters and to advertise the web-based curriculum developed by DCFS.

The group is especially interested in exploring ways to provide special training and information about mandated reporting to religious institutions and clergy.

- Changes occurring within the public and private sector foster care system and how these changes affect services to children in placement.

In addition, the CFS Advisory Council devoted a considerable amount of discussion to the ongoing membership needs of the group, particularly the lack of new members appointed to fill vacancies left by people who have retired or resigned from the Council over the past 2 years.

### **Educational Presentations**

**Child Protection Update**—Deputy Director, Gailyn Thomas, provided an overview of child protection initiatives. She summarized the statewide redistribution of staff that resulted in Cook County staff being relocated to other regions. This has resulted in smaller caseloads for child protection and a growth in intact family services, both through new DCFS teams and new expectations from private agencies. There are still concerns that DCFS has not been able to hire enough bi-lingual staff for Northern Region. A workgroup has been meeting to revise Procedures 300, Appendix B, so as to incorporate investigative recommendations from the Office of Inspector General and the Child Death Review Teams. A comprehensive training is being planned to address the retraining of all child protection staff when the revisions are complete.

Deputy Director Thomas also highlighted the recent implementation of the web-based Mandated Reporter training, stemming from Citizen Review Panel recommendations, and a new Powerpoint curriculum for in-person mandated reporter trainings. She emphasized the completion of an investigative protocol for DCFS and law enforcement to assist children affected by methamphetamine. The Department has recently received a federal grant for a model meth treatment program in Southern Region, \$1.5 million over the next 3 years.

**DCFS Accomplishments**---Anne Studzinski, Special Assistant to the Director, spoke to the CFS Council about many of the Department's initiatives of the past 3-4 years. In particular, she highlighted Integrated Assessment and its attention to intervention with younger children and their biological and foster parents. The Child and Youth Investment Teams

(CAYIT) have been very successful for their inclusive approach to providing assessment and services for children coming into placement. The Residential Performance and Monitoring Unit has worked well in matching children to the best care provider, adjusting for various needs and strengths and the impact of trauma. In terms of research, the Department has adopted a trauma treatment curriculum that looks at various life experiences, including abuse/neglect/removal from home, in order to better treat the behavioral and mental health issues that children may be experiencing. The presentation concluded with a description of the Strengthening Families prevention program being developed in conjunction with the childcare community.

**DCFS wards and Department of Corrections**—Frances Elbert, Division of Service Intervention, discussed the various program requirements set up to meet the needs of DCFS wards who are assigned to the Department of Corrections. Ms. Elbert has visited all juvenile facilities and has personally assisted staff in addressing issues for DCFS wards about to be released from a DOC facility. Wards with a history of sex offenses or running from placement are the most difficult to place back into the community; nine adolescents are currently detained beyond their anticipated release date due to a lack of appropriate placement. Overall, DCFS has about 250-300 wards who are assigned to juvenile/adult corrections or local detention facilities. DCFS has developed a committee to consult on the special needs of children who have parole or probation violations. Three private agency programs have been developed to provide multi-systemic therapy for adolescents and foster parents/residential counselors both prior to and after a youth's release from detention. The Division of Service Intervention is continuing to emphasize the recruitment of foster parents who can provide specialized care for adolescents.

### **Recommendations**

The Children and Family Services Advisory Council makes the following recommendations for FY 2007:

- 1. DCFS needs to work closely with probation departments, community organizations, residential placement agencies, and foster parents to develop services for adolescents who are transitioning from detention facilities back into***

*the community and who need to be prepared for independence, particularly as this relates to housing, education and employment.*

*2. DCFS should continue to expand its training outreach to mandated reporters, should market its web-based training curriculum for access by all mandated reporters, and should develop specialized mandated reporter training for clergy.*

*3. DCFS should support increased outreach and collaboration with other state agencies, particularly the Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Corrections in order to provide services to abused children and increase programs designed for prevention of further maltreatment.*

*4. DCFS should continue to monitor the implementation of P.A. 92-295/ HB 3055 in schools to determine if it is effective in protecting at-risk children from further abuse.*

*5. DCFS must invest in more training of private agencies; more recruitment, support, and training of foster care providers; and more funding for post-adopt services to keep families stable and intact.*

### **Future Directions**

The CFS Council will work with DCFS staff to address the problem of new member appointments to replace those members whose terms expired in 2005. The Division of Child Protection will continue to provide leadership to the Council in conjunction with the Division of Communications.

## **Panel 2. Statewide Citizen's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect**

The Statewide Citizen's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) is made up of members with experience and knowledge of Illinois human services, educational and health care, children with special needs, child and family advocacy, and community life. The Director of DCFS appoints members of SCAN to 3-year staggered terms. The committee advises the Department on child abuse and neglect prevention services as well as community-based services that promote the health, safety, and well-being of children throughout the state. SCAN is an advisory group to DCFS, and its establishment is a part of the *Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA, 325 ILCS 5/11.7)*, the Illinois statute that governs child protection throughout the state.

SCAN holds bi-monthly meetings throughout the year. The October meeting is scheduled in conjunction with the annual Prevent Child Abuse Illinois Conference and brings all the members together for a day of in-person discussion. The other meetings are arranged by videoconference between Springfield, Chicago, and a downstate location. Gwen Mastin serves as the SCAN chairperson; she is the President and CEO of New Phoenix Assistance Center in Chicago. Diane Scruggs, CEO of Healthy Families Chicago, serves as the SCAN vice chairperson. DCFS Administrator, Gail Jackson, serves SCAN as the Department's liaison and coordinator.

### **Meeting Dates for FY 2007**

The SCAN Committee held meetings on:

August 16, 2006

October 18, 2006

December 6, 2006

February 21, 2007

June 20, 2007

### **Focus Topics**

SCAN conducted a comprehensive schedule of meetings during 2007. During the early part of the fiscal year, SCAN was involved in the final review of prevention materials on

methamphetamine abuse targeted to youth and teenagers. This was an outgrowth of training delivered to SCAN by Illinois State Police officers on methamphetamine manufacture and the way in which meth affects adult users and the children who live in the household. Meth abuse has also been identified as a serious factor in a large majority of DCFS cases during the past 2 years, particularly cases where the children are taken into protective custody and subsequently enter foster care. SCAN worked with the DCFS Office of Communications to develop two new flyers that have been targeted to schools, licensed day care centers, hospitals and child welfare/youth service agencies involved with prevention initiatives and activities. The flyers and brochures were printed in English and Spanish, and more than 125,000 were distributed statewide to schools, social service agencies, and legislators. SCAN members also had an opportunity at the October 2006 meeting to review a range of SACWIS case files and gain further understanding and experience with procedures followed by Child Protection investigators as they manage their work in the field with families and children.

For the latter part of FY 07, SCAN members focused considerable discussion on prevention topics. This discussion was done in preparation for the issuance of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that would specifically solicit development of new prevention-oriented projects to be funded from the State Tax Check-Off fund. The following topic areas were covered by special presentations and discussion:

- Fatherhood initiatives, especially programs targeted to young fathers, were discussed. The members determined the focus should be on developing new programs and activities that keep fathers connected to their children, that help build a more productive parent/child relationship, that improve knowledge of responsible parenting techniques, that decrease the potential for abuse and neglect, and that assist children by encouraging fathers' economic participation in family life.
- The SCAN members also concentrated upon a discussion of programs that impact young children from age 0-3 living in intact families who may be at risk for abuse or neglect. Several new programs have been initiated in Illinois, including Strengthening Families, a program that partners with child care settings to involve parents in specific activities that improve the parent/child relationship and provide supportive resources to young families. Other model programs include Healthy Families, the Fussy Baby Network, and

infant/parent psychotherapy programs, all of which work to help young parents understand the needs of their infants and cope with the demands of child rearing.

Following further research into these topics and a discussion of needs related to children and families served by DCFS, the members of SCAN assisted Gail Jackson, Coordinating Administrator, in preparing Requests for Proposals. The first RFP was designed for programs to increase the parenting skills and address the fatherhood role of DCFS male adolescents who are wards of the state. The second RFP addressed the need for programs to provide family strengthening support, parenting education and early childhood development services to intact families with children aged 0-3.

### **Presentations on DCFS Activities and Projects**

***Updates on the Division of Child Protection:*** Ms. Gailyn Thomas, Deputy Director, presented information on the reorganization of Department services. Working closely with representatives of AFSCME and the Governor's Office, DCFS has realigned staffing locations and assignments and has hired new workers throughout the state. The reorganization was implemented during the latter half of 2006. Investigative teams and Intact Family service teams each have a distinct management structure administered under the Division of Child Protection while Placement teams are administered under the Division of Field Operations. Both service divisions report to a single Regional Administrator. Procedural guidelines for Intact Family Services have undergone a major update, and both DCFS and private agency staff will receive training on the new requirements of Procedure 302. A new hub location for children entering foster care in Chicago opened on October 1, 2006 under contract with Aunt Martha's Youth Services. Following intake, children are assigned to foster care homes or residential facilities designed to meet the needs of specialized populations.

***Web-Based Mandated Reporter Training:*** Ms. Womazetta Jones, DCP Training Coordinator, presented an overview of the web-based training for mandated reporters that is being developed by DCFS, The Chicago Public Schools, The Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, and Western Illinois University. The training was prepared during the summer and fall of 2006 and will be accessible throughout the state via a link on the DCFS website in early 2007. The training is interactive in format and requires about 90 minutes for

completion. The web-based training is designed to communicate basic concepts of child abuse reporting to professionals from all disciplines. Many additional linkages are available in order to provide more detailed information to specialized populations of reporters.

***Prevention Focused Services:*** The SCAN committee heard presentations by Ms. Cynthia Savage and Ms. Kathy Goetz-Wolf about several new grants and initiatives. Ms. Savage spoke about the development of a National Resource Center for Fatherhood Programs and discussed some of the local programs that were eligible for Community Access Grants. Fatherhood programs take on a variety of target populations, some geared to expectant fathers, some to fathers who are incarcerated, others to fathers who are non custodial and unmarried. Many fatherhood initiatives work in conjunction with healthy marriage programs. Ms. Goetz-Wolf described the Strengthening Families initiative in which DCFS is partnering with Head Start and child care programs to provide specific support services to parents and their pre-school children. Preventing abuse and neglect and working with DCFS intact families to prevent repeat maltreatment is the goal of this initiative. Illinois is one of 7 states piloting the Strengthening Families approach.

***Case File Review:*** The SCAN Committee conducted a case review at the meeting on October 18, 2006. The case files included a sample from Cook South, Northern, Central and Southern regions, most involving the possible abuse or neglect of a young child under age 5. The committee noted that many of the case files were extremely thorough and orderly, and they commended the investigators who were particularly attentive to detail. The most notable comment in several cases was that not all relevant parties were interviewed or that recommended follow-up services were not sufficiently detailed.

In terms of case review recommendations, the SCAN panel requested that Child Protection workers indicate more specifically in the investigative file the services being provided to the child and/or family by DCFS staff or a private agency.

### **Recommendations**

For FY 2007, the SCAN Committee makes the following recommendations.

**1. SCAN recommends that DCFS, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Department of Professional Regulation develop requirements for licensed professionals serving as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect to receive appropriate training on mandated reporting as a condition of licensure or certification. The agencies should share available resources in order to ensure that all licensed professionals understand the importance of required mandated reporter training.**

**2. SCAN recommends that DCFS promote the use of web-based technology to inform mandated reporters of their responsibilities and to provide them with a basic understanding of how to report child abuse and neglect to the DCFS statewide hotline. DCFS should also continue to offer in-person training for mandated reporters, should regularly update and reprint informational brochures and manuals, and should aggressively market and distribute its mandated reporting materials to all professionals. Individuals completing mandated reporter training should be issued a certificate form with their name on it.**

**3. SCAN members are interested in promoting greater public awareness of methamphetamine use and the effects that this can have on families and their children. Prevention materials should be widely distributed and DCFS should continue to work with other state government entities including the Illinois State Police and private sector agencies to develop marketing and information sharing strategies to promote a coordinated intervention approach in cases of methamphetamine use or manufacture.**

**4. DCFS should initiate a new dialogue with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to promote the sharing of information on HB 3005/ P.A. 92-295 with school principals and develop protocols in order to determine how schools can best receive, maintain, transfer, and appropriately purge DCFS indicated findings of child abuse for implementation and consistency in managing child records. The review of these protocols should become part of each year's administrative in-service training for schools and should be listed on the meeting agenda.**

**5. Any agency that contracts with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and/or is licensed by DCFS will be required to annually**

***demonstrate their on-going training as mandated reporters, and such evidence will be on file at the agency to be provided upon request.***

**Future Directions**

SCAN remains focused on its mission as a Citizen Review panel and will be attentive to follow-up on this year's recommendations. SCAN continues its commitment to prevention initiatives and anticipates that the funding and development of new programs will have a significant impact on reducing the risk of children being abused or neglected.

### **Panel 3. Children's Justice Task Force**

The Children's Justice Task Force is a multidisciplinary advisory group that makes recommendations to DCFS for improving the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of child abuse cases, particularly cases of child sexual abuse/exploitation and cases involving a combination of jurisdictions. The Task Force was first organized in 1989 according to guidelines in the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and it became one of the Illinois Citizen Review Panels in 1999. Recommendations from this panel are focused on reducing child trauma, enhancing the effectiveness of judicial and administrative actions in child abuse cases, and reforming state laws and regulations with regard to child protection and child welfare while ensuring fairness to all affected persons.

The members of Children's Justice represent professionals in the fields of child protection, law enforcement, medical and mental health, attorneys for the prosecution and defense, criminal and civil court judges, education, children with disabilities, child advocates, and parent advocates. The Task Force includes 28 members appointed by DCFS to staggered 4-year terms. The group meets quarterly at various locations throughout the state and by videoconference. The current chairperson is Kathryn Pomahac, Director, Carrie Lynn Children's Center in Rockford; the vice-chairperson is Dr. Careyana Brenham, family physician and faculty member at SIU School of Medicine in Springfield. Cheryl Peterson, Ph.D. is the DCFS administrator and coordinator for Children's Justice.

#### **Meeting Dates**

The Children's Justice Task Force met on the following dates:

September 8, 2006

December 1, 2006

February 2, 2007

March 22-23, 2007

June 1, 2007

#### **Focus Topics**

The panel focused inquiry on the following areas of child protection policy:

- Multidisciplinary coordination of child abuse investigative services, with additional training targeted to a joint audience of DCFS child protection specialists, law enforcement officers, and medical providers/facilities.
  - Enhanced awareness of how DCFS and law enforcement can coordinate a prompt and thorough response to situations involving domestic violence, substance abuse, and potential child abuse while assuring the safety of both the investigators and the child victims who are caught in the midst of these oftentimes volatile and dangerous environments.
  - DCFS initiatives focused on integrated screening and assessment of children and families at the front end of the child protection system that provide a range of health and mental health interventions to assure the safety of children, support intact family services, and work with both biological and foster families to effect family reunification.
  - The examination of DCFS cases where child abuse/neglect findings are appealed by the perpetrator and administrative hearings are held to determine whether the investigative findings will be upheld or expunged.

### **Educational Presentations**

***DCFS Integrated Assessment***—Kristin Kenefick and Paul Langevin from the DCFS Division of Clinical Services presented an informative discussion of the Integrated Assessment Program. When a child is taken into protective custody, federal and state mandates require all families to receive a front-end comprehensive psychosocial assessment to meet their physical and mental health needs and assure that appropriate mental health services are provided. The goals of Integrated Assessment are: 1) prevention and early identification; 2) coordinating medical and behavioral health services; 3) timely service delivery; 4) decreasing the secondary impact of coming into the child welfare system; 5) delivery of Best Practice services by qualified professionals; 6) emphasizing reunification and permanency; and 7) integrating services with overall case planning. Case planning is focused on the child’s needs with consideration of all support factors involving both the biological family and the foster care provider.

***Preview of Online Mandated Reporter Training***—Alicia Vega, Program Director at the Chicago CAC, presented a DVD preview of the web-based training for Mandated Reporters that has been developed in conjunction with DCFS, the Chicago Public Schools, and the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office. The members were favorably impressed and followed the preparation and final rollout of this training which appeared officially on the DCFS website, [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs) during April 2007.

***Children with Sexual Behavior Problems***—Gayle Hansen and Dick Winkler, Division of Clinical Services, provided information, statistics, and handouts on the Sexual Behavior Problems (SBP) program. DCFS has 6 regional Sexual Abuse Services Coordinators who handle referrals from field staff regarding wards who are exhibiting sexual behavior problems. DCFS is the first child welfare agency in the country to have staff specialists who deal specifically with sexual problems in children. The first step in the SBP program is to accurately identify kids with sexual behavior problems since much of the reported behavior is not really unusual, aggressive or threatening. Once children have been assessed, the coordinator does behavioral screening, clinical staffing, arranges for treatment, works with the caretaker on a supervision plan and monitors the treatment progress. Consultation and support services are provided to DCFS and POS agency personnel, foster parents, family members and treatment providers. The Coordinator stays involved throughout the life of the case. The presenters also explained current state regulations for placing adjudicated juvenile sexual offenders on the adult Sex Offender Registry at age 17.

***Children’s Advocacy Centers***—Kathy Pomahac, Executive Director, Children’s Advocacy Centers of Illinois, and Candace Masten, DCFS Project Director, presented an update on the growth and development of individual children’s advocacy centers and the state chapter of CACs. In the past year, two smaller counties have established their own CAC programs after several years of affiliation with larger, multi-county CACs. Funding for CACs has not been increased within the state appropriation, but the Children’s Justice grant has been used to support some modest expansion requests. A proposed state statute, HB 1391, would permit counties to collect an additional \$5 to \$30 (to benefit CACs) from the fees assessed on convicted offenders in criminal court. The bill will likely be enacted and will provide CACs with another source of ongoing funding.

***Child Abuse Appeals***—The Task Force reviewed some additional cases that were brought for appeal before the Administrative Hearings Unit. Meryl Paniak, Chief Administrative Law Judge, updated information and statistics on the number of investigations in which the DCFS indicated perpetrator appealed the indicated finding of abuse or neglect. She explained that the judges in the Administrative Hearings Unit base their decisions on a preponderance of evidence. The judges have recently received training on sexual abuse and changes within the DCFS allegation system. The Task Force members have indicated their interest in continuing to follow the process of administrative appeal hearings.

***Child Protection Updates*** --Throughout the year, the Children’s Justice Task Force also received regular updates from Gailyn Thomas, DCFS Deputy Director for Child Protection, and Keith Langston, Associate Deputy, about a number of concerns related to DCFS field services reorganization, changes in policy and practice, and training. A workgroup is addressing revisions to *Procedures 300, Reports of Abuse and Neglect*, in order to incorporate recommendations from the Office of Inspector General, the Child Death Review Teams, the Child and Family Services Review, and Best Practice. There is an ongoing effort to work more closely with law enforcement and medical professionals. A protocol for medically complex children has been completed, and revisions to the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) are underway.

### **Recommendations**

During 2007 the Children’s Justice Task Force identified the following recommendations as having critical importance to the achievement of its child protection goals:

- 1. DCFS must request expanded funding to support existing Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) and must commit new funding to develop additional CACs/satellite sites in unserved counties so that every child throughout the state of Illinois has access to coordinated investigative services provided by an accredited CAC.***
- 2. DCFS must provide funding and technical assistance to develop new protocols and procedures for the inclusion of physical injury cases into the multidisciplinary investigative approach of Children’s Advocacy Centers. These***

***protocols must ensure that child victims of abuse are receiving medical evaluations by physicians with knowledge in the area of child abuse medicine.***

***3. DCFS should work in partnership with other disciplines, particularly mental health and the juvenile court, to develop effective diagnostic and therapeutic programs for children with sexual behavior problems. Specialized interventions should be implemented for children, and supportive education and training resources must be available for parents, foster parents, and service providers.***

***4. Illinois must expand and enhance the development of regionally-based Child Protection Medical Centers to ensure that children alleged to have been abused or neglected have access to a medical evaluation by knowledgeable physicians and nurses who can also provide effective leadership, communication, training, and support to other professionals and court personnel involved in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse.***

***5. DCFS should actively support legislation which encourages individual assessment, treatment, and tracking for juvenile sex offenders and which prohibits categorical imposition of adult sex offender registration standards on juveniles.***

### **Future Directions**

The Children's Justice Task Force will continue to promote the multidisciplinary approach to child abuse investigation and will work to improve communication within the system of professionals who serve on the front lines of child protection.

The Task Force will also encourage DCFS to find innovative ways to market the new Web-Based Mandated Reporter Training and encourage the ongoing training of all mandated reporters.

#### **Panel 4. Child Death Review Team Executive Council**

The Child Death Review Team Executive Council was formed in 1998. It coordinates the operational procedures of the 9 regionally-based Illinois child death review teams and advises on statewide projects like the Annual Report and CDRT Symposium. The CDRT Executive Council includes the chairperson and vice-chairperson of each regional team for a total panel membership of 18. Public Act 88-614 (September 1994) established the Illinois child death review teams in state statute; amendments to P.A. 88-614 in 2001 authorized the executive council.

The CDRT Executive Council operates according to the following objectives: 1) to serve as the voice of child death review teams in Illinois; 2) to ensure that the data, results, findings, and recommendations of the teams are adequately used to make changes in policies, procedures, and statutes to protect children; 3) to collaborate with the General Assembly, DCFS, and others to develop legislation needed to prevent child fatalities and to protect children; 4) to ensure that the review process for the regional teams is standardized; 5) to develop an annual statewide training symposium; and 6) to assist in the preparation of an annual CDRT report. Dr. Daniel Cuneo of Belleville is the CDRT Council chairperson and Ms. Clairice Hetzler, Director, Children's Action Network in Quincy serves as vice-chairperson. Ms. Sherry Barr is the DCFS Coordinator.

#### **Meeting Dates for FY 07**

The Child Death Review Team Executive Council met on:

July 14, 2006

September 23, 2006

January 19, 2007

April 27, 2007

#### **Focus Topics**

During its meetings in FY 2007, the CDRT Executive Council reviewed a number of statewide issues and concerns regarding:

- The retention schedule for DCFS unfounded cases. In cases where a child has died, there may have been a prior DCFS investigation within the past year. But if the investigation was unfounded, the records have been expunged and no information has been preserved regarding the specific allegations and findings.
- Access to the DCFS Hotline by people reporting child abuse and neglect from out of state locations. The 800 number only works when calling within Illinois.
- Availability of quality training for DCFS workers on cases involving domestic violence and methamphetamine use or manufacture.
- Prevention initiatives that focus on dangers to children from 1) drowning; 2) sleeping with parents; 3) parental substance abuse, particularly methamphetamine; and 4) paramours caring for children.

### **Activities**

The CDRT Executive Council has established several subcommittees. Two of these—the Prevention committee and the Legislative committee—were initiated in FY 2006 and have met on several occasions to discuss issues of interest to all the teams throughout the state. The Prevention committee encouraged the CDRT Executive Council to expand its collaboration with DCFS, Department of Human Services, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, the Red Cross and the Illinois Department of Public Health in further promoting the statewide public awareness campaign on child drownings. The campaign, *Get Water Wise---Supervise*, which was first developed in 2003, continued to flourish throughout this fiscal year. During March and April the committee developed new brochures and posters in order to refine the message, focusing tightly on the urgency to save lives with supervision for children around water. The Committee spread their message through many news programs, radio programs, newspapers, and newsletters. The committee printed 45,000 English brochures, 12,000 Spanish brochures, 4,000 English posters, and 2,000 Spanish posters this fiscal year. Laminated bus cards were distributed to local transit districts and pediatricians' offices, and CDs of the PowerPoint presentation on the dangers of water for young children continued to be given out at conferences and sent to community organizations. In May 2007, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich proclaimed May to be Child Drowning Prevention Month.

The Prevention Committee discussed their concerns with regard to parent and child co-sleeping and explored various preventive options. DCFS workers began distributing a safe sleeping brochure to families with infants and small children receiving services. The brochure, *Safe Sleep for Your Baby*, from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, informs parents to hold their babies close to them but separate from them when they sleep. The committee continues to look at the problem of co-sleeping and its possible contributions to infant and young child fatalities.

The Prevention committee conferred with PCA Illinois and DCFS on the issue of paramours caring for children in the home. The paramour campaign is called "How well do you know your lover?" The campaign is aimed at increasing awareness of the role played by paramours in situations of child abuse and neglect. Paramours, or live-in boyfriends and girlfriends, are often not prepared to be the caretakers of young children although they often assume this role when mothers are at work or school. Dr. Deanna St. Germain informed the council that a recent study showed that the risk of inflicted injury to a child in a home where an unrelated adult lives is nearly 50 times greater than that for a child with two biological parents. Brochures have been developed and printed. The brochures are now available to be distributed. DCFS has taken this brochure and workers have begun distributing it among the families they serve. The brochure is in high demand and almost 25,000 of them have been sent out to public and private agencies at their request. This brochure is currently being translated into Spanish.

The annual Child Death Review Team Symposium was held September 21-22, 2006 at Sheraton Suites in Elk Grove Village. The presentations included: 1) Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse Within 120 Years; 2) Meeting Untrue Defenses in Abuse and Neglect Cases; 3) The New DCFS Trauma Response Plan and Its Implementation; 4) Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) – CDC New Developments. After the Symposium, there was some further discussion among the council members about how best to utilize the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation Reporting Form (SUIDI). Because coroners are not mandated to use this form and because there is currently no database maintained to track information contained on this form, the SUIDI is used rather infrequently. The Executive Council members discussed the possibility that a shorter version

of the form might be developed in coordination with the Coroner's Association and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The CDRT Council supervised the printing and distribution of the ***Illinois Child Death Review Teams Annual Report 2004***. This report provides detailed information and statistics on numerous categories of child death. It also presents charts of CDRT recommendations and DCFS responses regarding: 1) primary prevention; 2) DCFS systems; and 3) other systems. The Annual Report for calendar year 2005 is currently being developed.

### **Recommendations for 2007**

***1. The CDRT Executive Council recommends that DCFS continue to aggressively market and promote the drowning prevention brochures, posters, CDs and media presentations for "Get Water Wise—Supervise." Any parenting classes that are specifically funded under contract with DCFS and/or targeted to DCFS families should be required to include the CD PowerPoint information on drowning prevention in the curriculum used for the classes.***

***2. Hospital emergency rooms and local law enforcement agencies need to be educated about the importance of promptly reporting all fatal, near fatal, and suspicious injuries of children to the DCFS Hotline. A training initiative should be implemented that targets new employees and that systematically provides educational seminars to all regions of the state on a biannual basis. In turn, DCFS investigators must immediately request the assignment of a trained, experienced police detective to assist with investigations involving situations of fatal child abuse and serious child injury.***

***3. The telephone number for reaching the DCFS Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline from out of state locations should be widely advertised in all DCFS publications and on all websites. DCFS must assure that the number is also listed accurately and appropriately with Directory Assistance so that telephone operators routinely provide it to out of state callers.***

***4. DCFS must continue to expand and update staff training to provide all child protection investigators, and intact and permanency caseworkers—including***

***those authorized through Purchase of Service agencies—with the skills and tools needed to assess risks to children posed by domestic violence and parental substance abuse, including but not limited to alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.***

### **Future Directions**

The CDRT Executive Council, through the work of its Prevention and Legislative committees, will continue to make recommendations that provide for more child and family services and increased public awareness about issues of child safety and protection. The Executive Council will also be involved in implementation of recently enacted Illinois legislation, P.A. 95-0405 and P.A. 95-0527, that requires additional reporting by DCFS on responses to CDRT recommendations, that establishes a separate organizational approach and funding appropriation for child death review, and that authorizes a pilot project Child Death Investigative Task Force for the Southern Region of Illinois.

**THE DCFS RESPONSE TO  
CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS  
FROM 2006**

Rod R. Blagojevich  
Governor

Erwin McEwen  
Acting Director



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Illinois Department of Children & Family Services

June 28, 2007

Dear Citizen Review Panels:

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has reviewed the 2006 recommendations made by the Citizen Review Panels. The efforts of each panel to gather information, review state statutes and policies, and learn about DCFS programs have been impressive. In response, we have prepared this letter to provide an explanation of the steps that DCFS has taken to address the recommendations.

The majority of Citizen Review Panel recommendations relate to actions to be taken by the Division of Child Protection; a few recommendations also involve changes within the Division of Program Operations and the Division of Service Intervention. As much as possible, these different divisions have contributed information for this response letter. DCFS appreciates the work that you have accomplished in helping to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children who come into contact with the Illinois child protection system. Your recommendations create a “community of concern” which is vitally important to achieve positive outcomes for abused and neglected children.

***Division of Child Protection***  
**Mandated Reporters**

The Department conducted a survey of mandated reporters in 2005 as a component of the federal Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The sample included all mandated reporters on reports not accepted by the State Central Registry (SCR) between September 1, 2004 and February 27, 2005. Questions on the survey were developed in part from the review completed by the Division of Quality Assurance, the SCR self-study, and the goals of the Department’s PIP. The survey revealed that:

- A significant number of respondents said that SCR was not able to immediately address their calls but rather called them back within 0-3 hours;
- SCR hotline staff interfaced well with the community, demonstrated appropriate professional behavior and were competent;
- A significant number of mandated reporter respondents (87%) had not attended mandated reporter training during the last 24 months preceding the survey;
- Respondents had no discernable complaints regarding their experience with SCR.

The Division of Child Protection is evaluating the feasibility of replicating the Mandated Reporter survey during a similar period in 2007. Conducting another similar survey will provide feedback

into the effectiveness of some changes made at SCR (not necessary related to the previous survey responses) as well as the current training needs for Mandated Reporters.

### Mandated Reporter Manual

Once the Illinois Legislature concludes the 2007 95<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, DCFS will assess changes in statutes impacting Mandated Reporters since the last update of the Mandated Reporter Manual. Depending upon the nature of any changes, the Department will weigh the prospect of updating the Manual and preparing a subsequent distribution to agencies and individuals bearing responsibilities as mandated reporters.

### Mandated Reporter Training

The Department centralized all requests for Mandated Reporter training and the scheduling of staff for presentations. The manager in charge of this process assures that there are appropriate staff persons available to present and distribute appropriate reference materials for agencies requesting training.

The Department convened a committee in 2005-2006 to assess the feasibility of standardizing the Mandated Reporter in-service curriculum with the following objectives: 1) training a cadre of DCFS staff to conduct in-service training using the standardized curriculum; 2) offering regular monthly training dates at central locations throughout the state; 3) offering a pre- and post- test and a certificate of completion; 4) tracking participants via testing and sign-in sheets; 5) notifying the mandated reporter community of the training schedule on DCFS websites and via communication with employment departments, notices to educational institutions, professional newsletters, etc. A standard PowerPoint presentation has been prepared for use by trained DCFS personnel across the state.

Additionally, the Department is evaluating the feasibility of offering in-person training at community colleges and DCFS regional offices on a quarterly basis. Advantages for this approach include a regular schedule of presentation dates and locations to which entities with mandated reporting staff can send participants. The plan is to post dates and locations on the DCFS website and include information in communications with employment department, notices to educational institutions, professional newsletters, etc. The target completion date is FY 2009.

### Web-based Mandated Reporter Training

Throughout 2006, the Department worked closely with the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, the Chicago Public Schools, the Cook County State's Attorney, the Chicago Police Department and Western Illinois University to develop a state-of-the-art online training for mandated reporters. The various agencies wanted a training approach that was interactive, engaging, informative, and comprehensive. Several professionals and members of the Citizen Review panels were approached to provide feedback on the original model. Announcement of the online training website was launched during a combined press conference of the agencies in Chicago on April 17, 2007. The site provides a pre- and post-assessment of specific information learned as well as training on the overall concepts related to mandated reporting. For staff of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system, an internal connection allows them to print certificates of completion for their personnel files. Future planning includes the ability for other entities and individuals to print completion certificates. The website can be accessed via a link at: [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs).

### **Out-of-State Hotline Number**

The Department has published the out-of-state telephone number for those individuals wanting to make child abuse and/or neglect reports. The number (217-524-2606) is accessible on the IDCFS website, via a link on the Illinois government website and is displayed prominently in conjunction with the online Mandated Reporter training and its link at: [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs).

### **House Bill 3055/ P.A. 92-292**

When SCR sends notification of a finding of child abuse to a school's principal, the letter summarizes information about HB 3055. The letter explains the purpose for the notification, the length of time the notification should remain in the student's public school file, and confidentiality aspects of the notification. School administrators may contact the DCFS administrator in charge of the State Central Registry (SCR) by phone or fax with any questions. The SCR administrator regularly responds to school personnel inquiries about HB 3055 and provides in-person training and information at educational facilities upon request. The Illinois State Board of Education has offered to work with DCFS to post further clarification of P.A. 92-292 on the ISBE website.

### **Methamphetamine:**

The Department partnered with the Illinois State Police and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to develop the Drug Endangered Children (DEC) protocol in 2005. The protocol standardized the procedures of "first responders" to child abuse and neglect when they encounter situations with illegal production of methamphetamines.

The DEC protocol describes the coordinated response between law enforcement and DCFS (including ISBE where appropriate) when making decisions about children who are endangered by the use or manufacturing of methamphetamines. The DEC protocol:

- provides Law Enforcement investigators with a child welfare response system that quickly addresses the needs of any involved children;
- minimizes delays in the DCFS response in order to ensure child protection and safety;
- promotes a coordinated investigation between Law Enforcement and DCFS Child Protection that protects the integrity of the evidence needed for each investigative system;
- ensures that all affected children are enrolled in school, as appropriate.

In addition to the investigative protocol, DCFS developed the 1) Statewide Medical Care Protocol for Drug Endangered Children in Illegal Methamphetamine Labs; and the 2) Physician's Guide for Medical Examination of Children Exposed to Methamphetamine Laboratories. Caregivers are also provided with a special guidebook for the care of children exposed to methamphetamine labs.

To ensure consistent training delivery, the Illinois State Police conducted all training of DCFS staff and Purchase of Service Providers on the Drug Endangered Child Protocol. Due to funding constraints for the DEC project, the Illinois State Police delivered the last training to Department staff in the fall of 2006. Currently, DCFS is in negotiations with ISP to resume sessions for staff and POS providers that have not received training. Additionally, the Department is considering assessing ISP's curriculum--with their consent--for internal delivery and incorporation into other training curricula (e.g., Foundations, Investigations Training for New Hires, etc).

As part of the Department's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) filed with the Administration of Children and Families (ACF), a committee was convened to revise the Substance Affected Families/Substance Exposed Infant policy. One significant modification included processes for screening youths suspected of substance misuse. Revisions were incorporated in the statewide Reunifications Training that was delivered to staff during the summer and fall of 2006.

The DCFS Office of Communications has also been working closely with the SCAN Committee throughout 2006 and 2007 to produce a prevention brochure and flyer targeted to schools and youth audiences. The materials are completed and have been distributed.

### **Drowning Awareness Campaign**

DCFS and several of its partner agencies assisted the Office of Communications in designing a new brochure and 4 new posters to advertise the *Get Water Wise---Supervise* drowning prevention campaign that had been initiated in 2003 upon the recommendation of the Child Death Review Teams. The posters, which have been printed in both English and Spanish, communicate a powerful message to parents and caregivers about the importance of adult supervision at all times when children are in and around water. The posters and brochures have been featured during an extensive media campaign conducted throughout the state during May and June 2007. Governor Rod Blagojevich also proclaimed May 2007 as Drowning Prevention Month in Illinois.

CHICAGO, May 2, 2007 – Calling on caring citizens across the state to join a campaign to help keep children safe near water, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today proclaimed May as *Childhood Drowning Prevention Month* in Illinois.

“As a father, I know how much parents try to anticipate danger and do what they can to keep their kids out of harm’s way. During the month of May we take time to focus on preventing one of the leading causes of accidental death for children: drowning. Through careful supervision and awareness around water, we can protect young children from drowning,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

Nationally, drowning is the leading cause of accidental death among children ages 1 to 4, and the second leading cause for children 1 to 14. In Illinois, 17 children lost their lives to accidental drowning in 2006, following annual totals of 24 in 2005 and 21 in 2004. In response to these tragedies, and at the recommendation of Illinois’ Child Death Review Teams, Illinois in 2003 launched the “Get Water Wise...Supervise!” campaign, a collaborative effort of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Prevent Child Abuse Illinois (PCA Illinois), the American Red Cross Illinois Capital Area Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Illinois Department of Public Health (DPH).

“We know from painful experience that this loss can happen to any family, any time a child is near water,” said DCFS Acting Director Erwin McEwen. “These are good families who love their children and care for them well, only to make one tragic mistake when they step away to answer the phone or retrieve something from the family car. Many of us think of water safety as a concern only when children are near swimming pools; we need to understand that

drowning can be a swift and silent occurrence, striking anywhere children come into contact with water.”

### Direct-Service Training

The Department trained all direct service staff, including affiliated private agency caseworkers, on the new Domestic Violence Policy. The training commenced in October 2005 and was offered regularly through September 2006. Domestic violence specialists in Cook Central and Cook South regions are available to provide ongoing support and consultation.

The Substance Affected Family/Substance Exposed Infant policy was revised based upon the Department’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Information was incorporated into the Reunifications Training which was delivered to all front line staff in the summer and fall of 2006.

The Department convened a workgroup to review the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) and make appropriate revisions to the instrument and corresponding training. The work of this inter-divisional committee included evaluating current definitions of safety and risk, factor application, safety plan development, etc. Targeted implementation of a field-level pilot study is scheduled for early summer 2007.

The Department adopted and approved Procedures 302.388, Intact Family Services, in August 2005. Procedures 302.388 require specific approaches for identified family dynamics such as substance abuse and domestic violence. Training for all DCFS Intact staff is complete. POS supervisory and administrative staff received a Training of Trainers curriculum and used it to train their own staff. This intact training was completed in the latter part of 2006.

The Division of Child Protection conducted a mandatory one-day training workshop in critical thinking principles for all of its direct-service supervisors. The intended outcome of this December 2006 workshop was for supervisors to immediately begin applying principles of critical thinking in their supervision of investigation and intact field personnel and in reporting during various reviews and conferences. Management persons responsible for conducting these conferences and reviews were expected to ensure and document integration of these principles into those processes. Additionally, supervisors and managers are to assess their subordinates on an ongoing basis regarding the identified principles and provide examples on annual performance evaluations. Supervision notes are expected to immediately reflect assimilation of these principles into the supervisory process of direct-service staff.

Identified critical thinking principles included:

- Ability to recognize information relevant to investigations, cases, and matters under discussion;
- Ability to ask probative questions of key participants, service providers, family members;
- Ability to synthesize all available information to determine relevance in decision-making for child safety and service needs;
- Ability to evaluate and synthesize contradictory information whether observed or reported;
- Ability to clearly and accurately communicate the rationale for investigative or case decisions, both verbally *and* in writing;
- Ability to link a family’s history with current observations and information;

- Capacity to assess safety and risk based upon the **total information** *rather than* a narrow range of evidence and information;
- Ability to revise judgments when there is mounting and verifiable evidence to the contrary.

### **Children’s Advocacy Centers**

Thirty-eight Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) have been established in Illinois and they serve 85 of the state’s 102 counties. DCFS provides funding to 36 of these centers of which 26 are accredited through the National Children’s Alliance; 10 of the remaining CACs are working toward accreditation. Two CACs became operational during FY07 without assistance from DCFS, although a relationship with these CACs will be developed in FY 08. In addition to funding, DCFS provides ongoing assistance to CACs in the form of: 1) case investigations or team coordination needing problem resolution, 2) governing board and budget issues, and 3) information/support on training and funding opportunities. DCFS collaborates with the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Illinois, the state chapter office of the National Children’s Alliance, to ensure that CACs are operating effectively and to assist them in their endeavors to achieve accreditation.

In 1996 the Illinois Legislature appropriated funds into the DCFS budget specifically for CACs and continued to increase the appropriation annually until FY05, at which time there was a 2.25% across-the-board cut to the General Revenue Fund which reduced all CAC grants. FY 07 CAC grants remained at their FY05 levels, although 4 CACs received increases late in FY06 (from federal funds, CJA Grant) for expanding their geographic service areas to include adjacent counties that were without CAC services. Of the 17 counties that currently have no access to CAC services, DCFS has met with community members from 5 counties who are interested in establishing a CAC; however, no grant proposals were received when funding was available through the Children’s Justice Act grant for that purpose. The federal Children’s Justice grant has been utilized during FY 06 and FY 07 to fund expansion and enhancement funding for 10 CACs, but all available funding is currently committed. DCFS program and budget staff have made requests annually to the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget for an increase in CAC funding, but no increases have occurred since FY 04. DCFS staff have already begun the process of requesting additional state revenue funding for CACs in FY09 to assist in the development and start-up of new Children’s Advocacy Centers in the 17 counties that remain unserved.

The Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center (CCAC) has indicated willingness—via a formal proposal—to expand its scope to include reports of serious harm upon completion of its facility expansion project. The proposal is under consideration by the Department.

### ***Division of Service Intervention*** **Transitioning DCFS Wards to Independence**

Transition planning for DCFS adolescents for whom family reunification, subsidized guardianship, or adoption is not an option is an ongoing process. It begins with an assessment of the adolescent’s needs and allows for input from the youth, caregiver, teachers, counselors, youth’s family, and caseworker. It provides for accountability on the part of the youth, the Department and other service providers, and includes periodic assessments to ensure successful transition to independence. All adolescents are unique; however, they share common needs when preparing for independent living.

DCFS uses the Ansell-Casey Life Skills assessment to develop well-defined transition plans for youth transitioning to self-sufficiency. Policies and programs are in place to expand post-secondary educational opportunities for youth; to support vocational training, job skills, job placement and retention; to promote mentoring programs with dedicated adults; and to offer financial, housing, and counseling support.

The Department offers the following programs through the Office of Education and Transition Services:

- **Youth in College/Vocational Training** – provides a monthly grant to youth in care who are attending college full time and maintaining a 2.0 GPA. Assistance with purchasing books and supplies is also provided.
- **Youth In Scholarship** – 48 scholarships are awarded annually. Youth in care, youth who aged out of care, and youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship are eligible to apply for the merit-based scholarship. Scholarship winners receive a monthly grant, a medical card, and help with purchasing books and supplies.
- **Community College Payment Program** – pays tuition and fees expenses for youth in care for up to 4 semesters, after financial aid has been applied.
- **Education and Training Voucher Program** – youth in care, youth who aged out of care, and youth who achieved permanency through guardianship or adoption at age 16 or older are eligible for up to \$5000 per year to assist with “cost of attendance” expenses at an accredited post secondary program.
- **Employment Incentive Program** – youth in care who are working a minimum of 20 hours per week can receive \$150/month, and up to \$200 one time to assist with purchasing work related clothes, supplies, etc., for a maximum of 12 months.
- **Life Skills Program** – youth in care are required to have an Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment at ages 14, 16 and 6 months prior to leaving care. Life skills training is available through contracted agencies for youth showing deficits/need on the assessment.
- **Added Chance Employment Program** – youth in care in Cook County can participate in pre-employment workshops and job placement through the Alternative Schools Network
- **Alternative Schools Network** – 275 slots are available to youth in care who are not succeeding in traditional school to be placed in a alternative school setting and receive support and guidance from the Alternative Schools Network staff.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of Children and Family Services welcomes continued recommendations from the Citizen Review Panels. With the assistance of these advisory committees, DCFS and its partners will assure continuing improvements to the child protection system throughout Illinois.

Sincerely,

Gailyn Thomas  
Deputy Director for Child Protection

**APPENDIX**  
**LIST OF CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS**

## **CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS STEERING COMMITTEE**

September 2007

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