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Introduction

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (Task Force) is a statutorily established, multidisciplinary citizen review panel to New Jersey’s child welfare system. The Task Force also serves as New Jersey’s Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force and the designated entity that entitles it to receive and administer CJA funds.

The purpose of the Task Force, in accordance with the statute, is to study and develop recommendations regarding the most effective means of improving the quality and scope of child protective and preventative services provided or supported by State government. This includes a review of the practices and policies utilized by Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), formerly the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), and Family and Community Partnerships (FCP), formerly the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in order to:

1) Optimize coordination of child abuse related services and investigations;
2) Promote the safety of children at risk of abuse or neglect;
3) Ensure a timely determination with regard to reports of alleged child abuse;
4) Educate the public about the problems of, and coordinate activities relating to, child abuse and neglect;
5) Develop a statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect and mechanisms to facilitate child abuse and neglect prevention strategies in coordination with FCP;
6) Mobilize citizens and community agencies in a proactive effort to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect; and
7) Foster cooperative working relationships between state and local agencies responsible for providing services to victims of child abuse and neglect and their families.
8) Serve as one of DCF’s federally mandated Citizen Review Panels.

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides CJA grants that are used to develop programs to reform state systems and improve New Jersey’s response to cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and suspected cases of child abuse and neglect fatalities.

CJA funds are also used to establish and support programs to improve New Jersey’s child protection system in a manner that limits additional trauma to child victims of abuse and neglect. In accordance with the Task Force Three-Year Assessment, model programs and innovative approaches were implemented to improve the identification, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect, as well as enhance the effectiveness of the judicial process.
The New Jersey Children’s Trust Fund (CTF) is a private/public partnership created by law in 1985 to fund child abuse and neglect prevention programs in New Jersey communities. CTF mainly receives funds primarily from donations made by residents via a check box on New Jersey state income tax forms. Private donors also make contributions. Any unspent balances from a previous fiscal year are automatically re-appropriated into the next fiscal year. These re-appropriated funds, along with the actual collections for the fiscal year, comprise the funding that supports the contracts being funded with the CTF collections. Below are CTF’s collections for each fiscal year under DCF:

The CTF supports local child abuse and neglect prevention programs that implement evidence-based and evidence-informed programs. The funding priority for the current funding cycle (through 6/30/14), established by the Task Force, is to promote positive parent-child attachment and support infant and early childhood mental-health programs. Grants were awarded in 2011 through a competitive process and the following program recipients were funded for a three-year cycle:

**Incredible Parents! Incredible Kids!** – This research-based prevention program targeting children and their parents is run by Family Connections Inc. It serves approximately 50-55 children and parents in Newark and Essex County. Core performance outcomes include the following:

- Children will demonstrate an increase in positive social skills as measured by the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Subscale social skills composite score.
- Parents of preschoolers, toddlers, and babies will indicate confidence in managing current child behavior in the home, on their own, to be measured by parent questionnaires.

**Positive Parenting–Padres Positivos** – This program targets at-risk, low-income Spanish and English-speaking immigrant Latino and refugee parents with preschool children from ages two-and-a-half to five. This program is run by the Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Greater Mercer County and serves approximately 75 parents and 150 children annually. Core performance outcomes include increases in family functioning, nurturing, and attachment.
To date, over 1,530 professionals involved in investigating child sexual abuse have been trained in Finding Words–NJ conference – September 20, 2013

Transitions: From Infancy to Adulthood
Atlantic City, New Jersey

Triple P-Positive Parenting Program – This program is run by South Jersey Healthcare and targets Cumberland County, specifically the cities of Bridgeton, Millville, and Vineland and serves approximately 85-100 parents annually. Core performance outcomes include a decrease in children’s conduct problems and an increase in children’s positive social behavior.

Task Force Proceedings

The Task Force meets bimonthly. These meetings provide the Task Force with the opportunity to discuss and assess items associated with its statutorily mandated work. Supporting the work of the Task Force are four committees and one subcommittee, which also meet bimonthly and report the results of their activities to the Task Force. There are approximately 80 individuals that contribute to this important work. To view a copy of meeting minutes, visit http://nj.gov/dcf/providers/boards/njtfcan/

Summary of Activities – 2013 to 2014

Each year, the Task Force sponsors multidisciplinary training programs to improve the handling of cases of child abuse and neglect. All Task Force-sponsored professional training programs are child-focused and designed to promote skills that prevent additional trauma to child victims and their families.

CJA funds were used to support the following professional development projects to enhance the knowledge of persons involved in the investigation, prosecution, assessment, and treatment of child abuse and neglect:

A. Finding Words – New Jersey: Forensic Interviewing & Preparing Children for Court – The goal of this project is to train frontline professionals involved in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse to conduct effective and legally defensible interviews of alleged child sexual abuse victims of various ages and to prepare children for court. The child-focused forensic interviewing project continues to reform the investigation and prosecution process and improve civil and criminal court proceedings.

B. Conferences – On September 20, 2013, the Task Force, in collaboration with DCF, hosted its full-day Biennial Conference for over 500 child protection professionals. The conference, entitled, “Transitions: From Infancy to Adulthood,” featured keynote speaker, Charlyn Harper Browne, PhD, Senior Associate and QIC-EC Project Director at the Center for the Study of Social Policy. This event focused on building professional knowledge and collaborative partnerships to improve the effectiveness of New Jersey’s child -maltreatment protection and prevention efforts and sought to encourage working relationships among volunteers and professionals in prevention, protective services, health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice to create child- and family-focused systems.
The Task Force is currently preparing for its skill-building conference on trauma-informed care in September 2014.

C. Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Training – CJA funds are provided to the MDT Coordinators’ Association for training to improve case management of the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases referred to the prosecutor’s office. This year’s conference, entitled, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children – A Training for Child Abuse Professionals,” was held on June 6, 2013, for 227 attendees. This conference featured morning keynote speaker Gigi Mei Lan Scoles, Assistant Prosecutor in Essex County and Intermittent Legal Advisor on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice and afternoon presenter Holly Smith, a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation and an advocate.

An additional training entitled, "Best Practice Guidelines for Multidisciplinary Teams," was held on October 3, 2013, at the Robert Wood Johnson Conference Center in Mercerville, New Jersey for 120 professionals: detectives, caseworkers, assistant prosecutors, mental health and medical professionals, and victim advocates. The full day training consisted of a discussion and updates in MDT best practices regarding child abuse investigation, prosecution, child protection, medical and mental health services and victim advocates. John Esmerado, Assistant Prosecutor, Union County Child Advocacy Center was the primary presenter. Attendees reviewed their discipline’s roles and responsibilities with reference to agency mandates and essential practices. The training concluded with a mock MDT case review presented by the Monmouth County MDT. The review presented steps in the investigation and advocacy on behalf of the victim both by child protection and law enforcement; and ultimately by prosecution.
Work of the Task Force Committees

Prevention Committee

The Prevention Committee of the Task Force coordinates the efforts of stakeholders with expertise in and a commitment to family support and the prevention of all forms of child maltreatment. It is the responsibility of the Prevention Committee to ensure the development and implementation of a meaningful and effective Statewide Prevention Plan.

Accomplishments for the past year include:

- The New Jersey Standards for Prevention: Building Success through Family Support (Standards), originally developed in 2003, has been reviewed, revised, and approved by the Task Force. This is the culmination of an eighteen-month process to review the original Standards:
  - The Standards include the History of the document, the Importance of Prevention, the Intended Purpose of the Standards, and Definitions of Prevention and Risk and Protective Factors.
  - The Standards for Prevention cover Practice with Families, Practice with Communities, and Administrative Standards. The Standards are accompanied by an Evaluation Rubric that allows families, researchers, funders, providers, administrators, communities, and policy makers to measure a program's compliance with best practice.

- The New Jersey Statewide Prevention Plan, Supporting Strong Families and Communities in New Jersey: Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014-2017 (Plan) has been completed and approved by the Task Force. A wide range of public and private partners—participated in the development of this Plan. Approximately 485 parents representing New Jersey's diverse population provided feedback and recommendations that helped to shape the plan.

  The Plan's five strategic goals:
  1. Communication
  2. Early Outreach and Engagement
  3. Partnerships
  4. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed Programs and Best Practices
  5. Infrastructure and Resources

  The Plan has been a collaborative project of DCF's FCP and the Prevention Committee of the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect. Public and private agencies will share in the Plan's implementation.


- The Prevention Committee facilitated presentations by the DCF’s FCP at committee meetings. This has included information on family success centers, home visiting, central intake, and data collection.
Prevention Committee Recommendation to the Department of Children and Families

The Prevention Committee recommends incorporation of measurable outcomes and strategies into all programs and services funded by the DCF’s Family and Community Partnerships.

Protection Committee

The Protection Committee is comprised of members of the Task Force and allied members in the field of child maltreatment. The members analyze state laws, policy, and case practice, both within and outside of New Jersey. The goal of the committee is to coordinate the efforts of stakeholders as well as to advance new methods to address child maltreatment.

During the course of the past year, the committee had three active workgroups:

- The Human-Trafficking Workgroup discussed a multi-disciplinary approach as a basis for establishing best practice guidelines for treating juvenile human trafficking victims.
- The Data-Collection Workgroup studied various data sources and how each entity defines sexual and physical abuse.
- The Batterers’ Accountability Work Group is researching the policy considerations and practice of prosecuting domestic violence cases by the State’s prosecutors’ offices.

Communication Committee

The mission of the Communication Committee is to increase awareness and promote social change related to child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention for the public and for professionals. It is also to promote awareness of the Task Force’s activities and issues.

Major activities for 2013-2014:

- Establishing the scope and responsibilities relative to the needs of the Task Force and other committees.
  - Developed a mechanism to explore the needs of other committees regarding collaboration on communication.
  - Collaborate with the Prevention Committee on marketing the 2014 NJ Statewide Prevention Plan.

- Created and began implementation of the Task Force’s media plan:
  - Produced the Annual Task Force Report
  - Creating a brand and logo for the Task Force
  - Developing plans for a Task Force calendar and web page
  - To identify and align with potential partners
**Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS)**

The SORS is charged by legislation with oversight of two critical areas:

1. Staffing issues within DCP&P, including staffing levels, caseload size, staff recruitment, training and retention; and
2. Outcomes for children and families.

SORS is also required to submit an annual report directly to the New Jersey Legislature on the work it does around staffing and outcomes. To view this report, please visit [http://nj.gov/dcf/news/reportsonline/taskforce/njtfca_reports.html](http://nj.gov/dcf/news/reportsonline/taskforce/njtfca_reports.html)

Over the past year, SORS has identified the following as priorities:

- Parent/child and sibling visitation;
- Educational stability, particularly the quality and consequences of educational decisions; and
- Staff training and retention in regard to measured outcomes of the current training curriculum.

Activities and accomplishments for 2013-2014 include:

- Education Stability Presentation by Michele Safrin;
- A comprehensive review of the Educational Stability Act to identify which aspects of the Act are working, and which are not; A presentation on the quality review process, including the development and implementation of any program improvement plan that is deemed necessary;
- The development of the second SORS staff survey, including a review of the last survey and discussions on how the new survey should be administered;
- A review of the DCF Training Academy coursework to help inform the survey development; And
- Ongoing review of visitation statistics to evaluate the challenges surrounding competent data to access the results.

Some of the priority areas for SORS in the upcoming year include:

- Completing, implementing, and reviewing a staff survey;
- Reviewing the complications of educational stability; and
- Analyzing the reality of visitation for children and their siblings in New Jersey and seeking ways to advocate for increased accountability for this service.
Task Force Committees/Subcommittee Membership

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Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office

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Therapist

Cynthia VanBrunt
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Court Appointed Special Advocates of New Jersey
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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