

The Florida Department of Children & Families

***Final Progress Report on the Recommendations
of the***

**Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on
Child Protection**

November 7, 2003



Jeb Bush *Governor*
Jerry Regier *Secretary*



INTRODUCTION

On May 6, 2002, Governor Jeb Bush established the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Protection to examine the child protection system, primarily in Dade County. The Governor's press release stated:

“The recent case of Rilya Wilson has raised very troubling questions about the state's performance in protecting children in the child welfare system. It is essential that we resolve these issues quickly and ensure that children in the care and custody of the state are properly supervised and cared for. In the case of Rilya, the system failed. We must guard against failure in other cases.

I am asking that the Panel focus its attention on the safety of children in the child welfare system. The Panel will also specifically focus on the adequacy of oversight and accountability within the Department of Children and Families. “

On May 28, 2002 Governor Bush accepted the final report of the Blue Ribbon Panel. On September 23, 2002 and January 13, 2003 the Department of Children and Families presented progress reports to the Blue Ribbon Panel. This document represents the final report on the department's continuing progress in meeting the recommendations of the panel that were addressed to the Department of Children and Families.

TASK STATUS MATRIX

Task Number	Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendation	Status on Page:
1a	Notify law enforcement immediately when there is reason to believe any child is missing.	1
1b	Law enforcement must immediately enter information on missing children into the Missing Child Information Center system.	2
2	Notify foster parents that they can lose their license for falsifying records or signing blank visitation forms.	6
3a	Visit each child under DCF supervision every month.	5
3b	Develop a credible verification system to ensure each child under DCF supervision is visited every month.	6
4	Revise guidelines for the handling of runaways that require immediate notification of law enforcement, followed by a pickup order and diligent search.	2
5	Implement a Foster Care Mediation Board in D11	17
6	Conduct criminal history checks on all new non-relative, relative, and foster care placements.	17
7a	Support Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) in reporting the resources needed to have GAL representation for every child in every dependency case in D11.	21
7b	Support Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to determine what resources are necessary to support administrative, supervisory, space and other infrastructure requirements.	21
8	Prepare budget request on cost of equipping every caseworker with a laptop.	19



9	Conduct a Guardian Ad Litem - District retreat to identify issues and establish mechanisms for conflict resolution.	21
10a	Purchase and install Live Scan machines statewide.	3
10b	FDLE will train DCF users.	3
10c	Obtain legislative funding to maintain Live Scan equipment and to ensure its availability in each district.	3
11	Conduct system of care review in D11.	23
12	Support expansion of the Miami-Dade CBC Alliance membership.	23
13	Complete entering of placement & home visitation information for all children in HomeSafenet.	5
14	Provide foster parents, and relative & non-relative caregivers a hotline number to call if they do not receive a home visit every 30 days.	6
15a	Case files will contain a current photograph, fingerprints & birth verification of every dependent child.	4
15b	Recommend the feasibility of a DNA swab for every dependent child.	4
16	Streamline pick-up orders and ensure missing persons divisions in law enforcement knows of all such children.	2
17a	Support Miami-Dade Public Schools in developing notification procedures for children who miss three consecutive days or are not regularly attending school.	22
17b	Support Miami-Dade Public Schools in developing an electronic method for sharing school information consistent with legal requirements.	22
18a	Provide caseworkers access to cameras with date stamp capability.	19
18b	Photograph every child quarterly.	4
19	Recommend how to expand "Family Case Conferencing" in D11.	20
20	Conduct a study to understand why D11 has a lower rate of employee dismissals than other districts and what, if anything should be done about that.	6
21	Convene a Children and Families Summit in Miami-Dade.	23
22	Develop a plan to achieve accreditation in core functions.	15
23a	Compare the performance and longevity of child welfare staff with degrees in social work or other behavioral sciences vis-à-vis other degreed staff.	8
23b	Determine if caseworker job descriptions are in keeping with national standards for social and child welfare work.	9
23c	Work with Florida universities toward a program where graduates could receive certification as a child welfare specialist.	9
24	Convene a series of local conferences to teach private providers how to use the HomeSafenet system.	19
25a	Determine the effectiveness of D11 human resources operations.	7
25b	Ensure that employees terminated for cause are never rehired within DCF.	7
25c	Ensure employees who resign in lieu of termination are indicated in the system so as not to be eligible for rehire.	7
25d	Accredit the DCF Human Resources staff by the Society of Human Resource Management.	8



26	Develop a plan to arrange almost-instant hotline access for calling in English, Spanish and Creole.	18
27	Provide and update relevant medical information to foster parent, relative and non-relative placements.	18
28	Task force to review DCF policies and procedures to streamline, condense and consolidate policies.	18
29	Develop policies around the issue of placements with relatives and non-relatives who have a "positive" criminal background check.	18
30	Complete background checks on all existing relative and non-relative caregivers.	18
31	Develop performance measures that accurately reflect those outcomes that are reasonably within the control of DCF.	15
33	Support Foster Care Review panels.	15
34	Recruit more pro bono attorneys for children in DCF's custody.	19
35	Expand additional co-location and shared responsibilities of child welfare staff and law enforcement officers.	20
36	Fully fund the Guardian Ad Litem program.	Legislative Recommendation
37	Fully fund Healthy Families within Miami-Dade County.	Legislative Recommendation
38	Establish an estimating conference that delineates funding streams and provides budget projections and requisite FTEs.	Legislative Recommendation
39	Analyze DCF capacity to support field operations and community care providers with quality-assurance, quality-monitoring and fiscal staff.	12
40	Provide a quick-response mechanism to allow the Agency Secretaries to shift appropriated funds from one program to another to meet emergency needs.	Legislative Recommendation
41	Pay caseworkers and supervisors better based on meritorious performance.	10
42	Make all DCF employees selected-exempt under the Service First initiative.	11
43a	Address high staff turnover.	11
43b	Address foster parent turnover.	15
44	Determine how dependent children at age 5 can be enrolled in kindergarten.	Legislative Recommendation
45	Develop an expedited rule-making process.	Legislative Recommendation
46	Amend "mandatory reporter" statute to include all individuals, including clergy, who volunteer with children.	Legislative Recommendation
47	Amend foster parent licensing requirements.	Legislative Recommendation
48	Fund a supervisory-management course to ensure outstanding managers.	11



Missing and Runaway Children: Developing Law Enforcement Partnerships

Operation SafeKids

Recommendation 1 a. Notify law enforcement immediately when there is reason to believe any child is missing.

Recommendation 4. Revise guidelines for the handling of runaways that require immediate notification of law enforcement, followed by a pickup order and diligent search.

CF Operating Procedure No. 175-85, *Prevention, Reporting and Services to Missing Children*, was revised effective October 17, 2002. This procedure describes uniform policy for ensuring that prompt and comprehensive actions are taken when children are missing for any reason.

Immediate notification to law enforcement is made by the caretaker any time a child under the age of 13 is believed to be out of the zone of safety for their age/development/mental status --- in a life-threatening situation, in the company of persons who might endanger the child, etc. This must be done within the first hour after checking for missing belongings or a note from a child.

Pickup orders are unnecessary and should only be used for a child who is alleged to have committed an offense.

When the danger is not believed to be imminent, caretakers have a check list of persons and places to contact such as relatives and schools, as well as the counselor. In all cases counselors gather fingerprints, photographs, most recent court orders and medical and psychological records for a complete report to local law enforcement within four hours.

Additionally, prevention efforts have been added to the operating procedure. Counselors must be alert to drug usage, depression, withdrawal and agitation. The districts/region must identify and assess homes where runaway behavior is frequent. Exit interviews with children provide data for analysis to identify needed improvements.

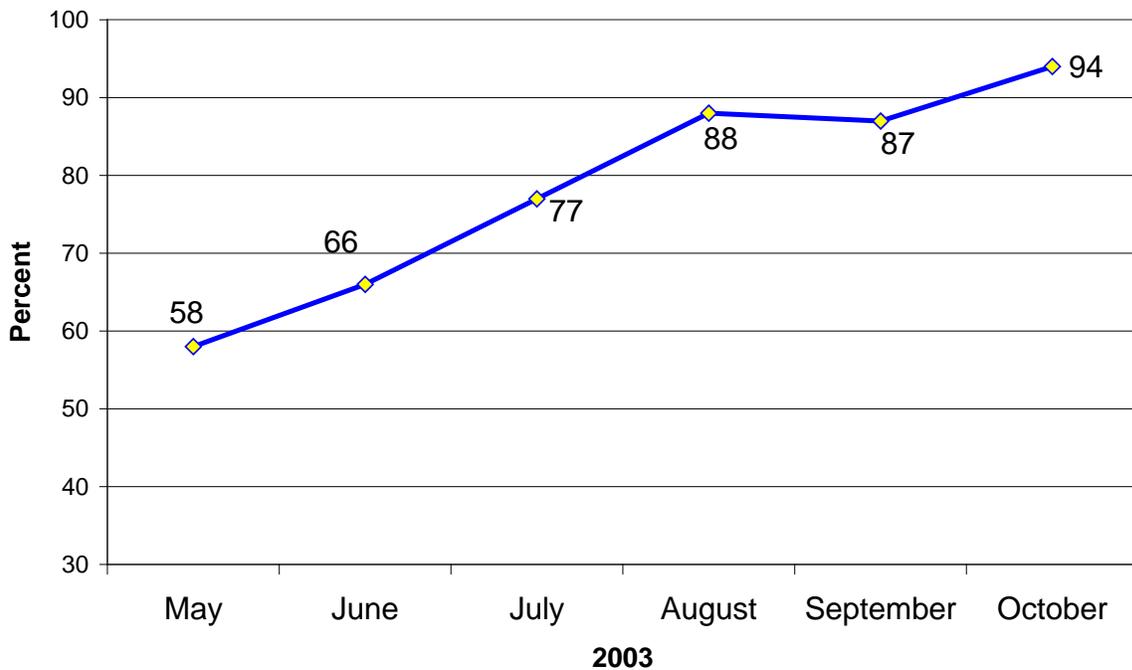


Recommendation 1 b. Law enforcement must immediately enter information on missing children into the Missing Child Information Center system.

DCF completes the Missing Child Reporting Form (MCRF) which will go into the Missing Child Tracking System. This must be done immediately after notification to local law enforcement. Completion of the electronic MCRF will initiate notification to FDLE/Missing Children Information Clearinghouse and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Performance in MCRFs completed timely has been improving significantly. During September 2003, 94% were completed within 24 hours.

Statewide Compliance with Timely Submittal of MCRFs



Recommendation 16. Streamline pickup orders and ensure missing persons divisions in law enforcement knows of all such children.

The Department has been advised to notify the court that a child is missing and that a missing person report will be taken by law enforcement. Pick-up orders or warrants are not necessary. Missing children are not to be entered into FCIC but entered into FDLE's missing children information clearinghouse.

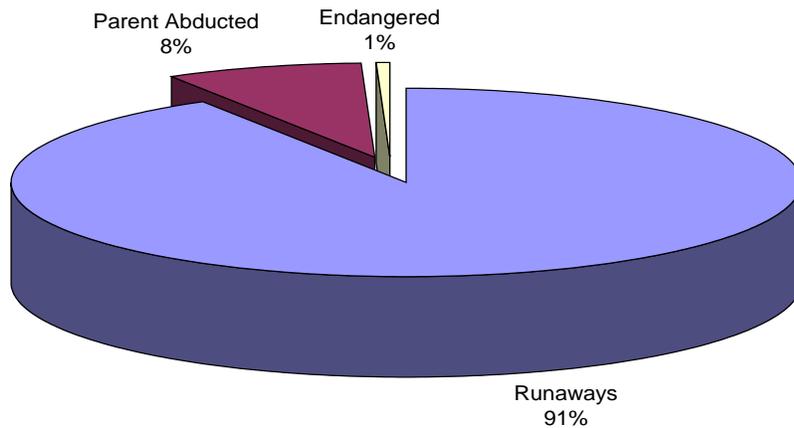


Children Out of Placement Data

There were 41 missing children as of November 7, 2003. In addition, there were 430 runaways for a total of 471 children out of placement. The vast majority of these children are teenagers.

	Age 0 - 6	Age 7-12	Age 13 -17	Totals
Endangered/Involuntary	0	2	1	3
Parental Abduction	28	7	3	38
Total Missing Children	28	9	4	41
Runaways	0	6	424	430
Total Out of Placement	28	15	428	471

**Children Out of Placement by Category
11/7/03**



Missing and Runaway Children: Photographs, Fingerprints, and Other Identification

- Recommendation 10 a. Purchase and install Live Scan machines statewide.**
- Recommendation 10 b. FDLE will train DCF users.**
- Recommendation 10 c. Obtain legislative funding to maintain Live Scan equipment and to ensure its availability in each district.**

Thirty-four additional live scan 1000's were purchased in June 2003 and allocated to districts based on geographic considerations to speed up the fingerprinting of persons in rural areas. Installation and training by Cross Match is underway and should be completed by 11/1/03. We also purchased sufficient flat-bed scanners for electronic submission of ink and paper fingerprints.



Recommendation 15 b. Recommend the feasibility of a DNA swab for every dependent child.

The Department assembled a Task Group of nearly two dozen persons from varied backgrounds to study the feasibility of collecting DNA on all children in the state's care. The University of Miami Ethics Program conducted research, hosted and facilitated the meeting, and prepared a final report, "Banked Tissue and Child Protection".

The recommendation of the Ethics Program did not support DNA collection and continues to be persuasive. Genetic information is a forensic tool for law enforcement, and its utility in child protection is unconvincing. DNA collection has implications that go way beyond identification. There is potential for genetic discrimination by government, insurers, employers, schools, banks and others.

We have and will continue to stay abreast of evolving technology and explore less invasive and less controversial technologies while improving management of child welfare with our community-based care partners. The new live scan 1000s greatly improve fingerprint capabilities for children as young as two. No infants are included in the endangered/involuntary category of children whose whereabouts are unknown.

Recommendation 15 a. Casefiles will contain a current photograph, fingerprints & birth verification of every dependent child.

Recommendation 18 b. Photograph every child quarterly.

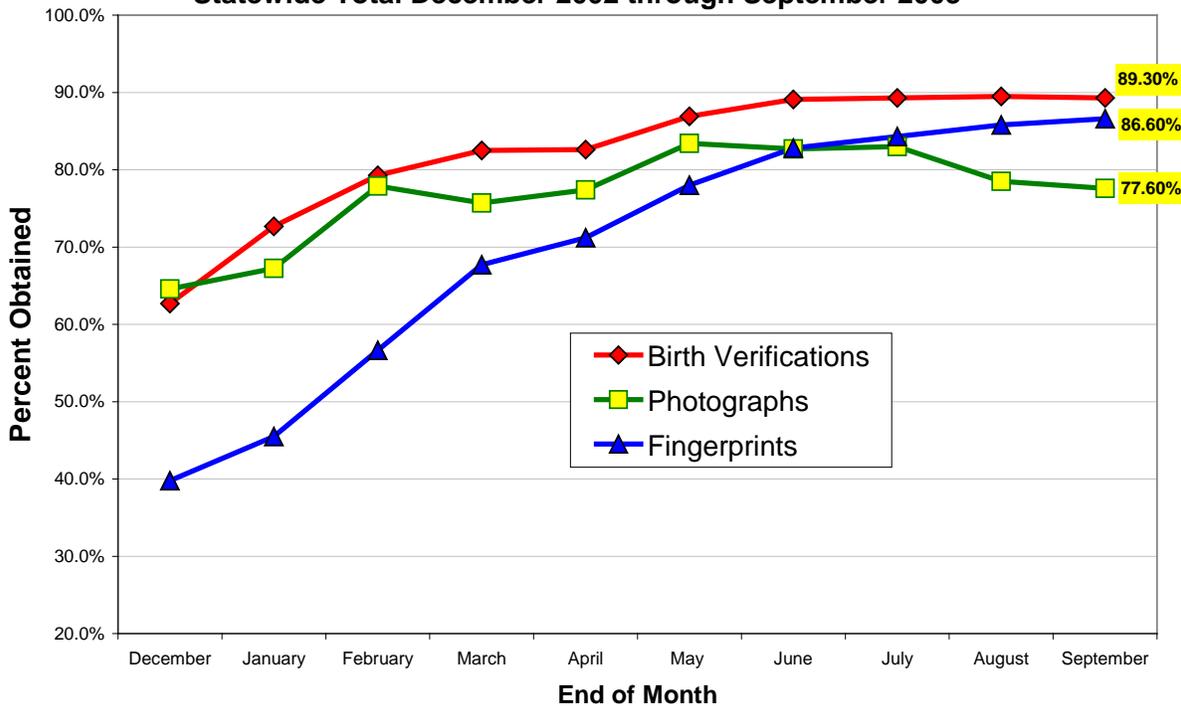
The Secretary made the decision, based on Listening Tour responses from staff, that a requirement for quarterly photographs was excessive. Photographs every six months for children under 60 months and annually for children over 60 months would be adequate.

Performance in all three areas has been steady. There are finger prints and birth verifications for almost 90% of the children. The percent for photographs fluctuates because young children must have new photos every six months and this is built into the measure by HomeSafenet. In September 2003, photographs were current for 78% of the children.

For help in obtaining birth verifications, the department has entered into an agreement with the Department of Health to allow on-line access to birth records in the Vital Statistics database for specified department and CBC staff.



Percent of Children in Care Whose Fingerprints, Birth Verifications and Photographs Have Been Obtained and Noted in HomeSafenet Statewide Total December 2002 through September 2003



Child Protection and Safety: Child Visitations

Recommendation 3a. Visit each child under DCF supervision every month. Recommendation 13. Enter placement and home visitation information in HomeSafenet for all children.

Staff have sought to visit every child in the custody of or under the supervision of the department in his or her placement every month in addition to seeing children regularly at other opportunities, e.g., schools, medical and counseling appointments, parent and sibling visits. Children not seen during the previous month receive the highest priority for visitation in the ensuing month.

Each month, about 95% of the children are seen and the data entered into HomeSafenet. During September 2003, according to HomeSafenet, 47,066 children were seen by DCF, CBC, sheriff or out-of-state staff.



Recommendation 2. Notify foster parents that they can lose their license for falsifying records or signing blank visitation forms.

DCF and Community-Based Care (CBC) lead agencies distributed a letter in June 2002 notifying foster parents and relative and non-relative caregivers of the ramifications of falsifying records. The letter was disseminated in English, Spanish and Creole in Miami-Dade. Information also was posted on DCF and foster parent association web sites. All new foster parents now receive this information during training.

Recommendation 14. Provide foster parents and relative/non-relative caregivers a hotline number to call if they do not receive a home visit every 30 days.

A hotline number has been established --- 800-FLA-FIND or (800) 352-3463. Reports on complaints are sent to the districts to resolve. Currently, the hotline averages about six calls a month.

Recommendation 3b. Develop a credible verification system to ensure each child under DCF supervision is visited every month.

A special system has not been developed for this recommendation, however, routine Quality Assurance reviews include visitation as an item to be verified for the cases sampled. Also, licensing visits for foster homes verify visits with the foster parents. The caregiver hotline discussed above is another method of assuring that visitation occurs.

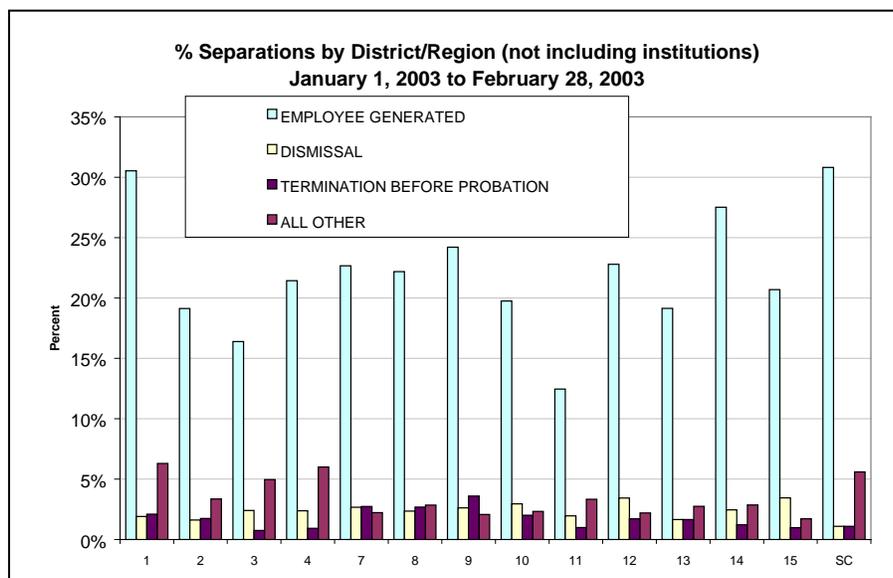
Human Resources

Recommendation 20. Conduct a study to understand why D11 has a lower rate of employee dismissals than other districts and what, if anything, should be done about that.

Staff from central office reviewed discipline taken, and not taken, in District 11. It was apparent that supervisors and managers needed training or retraining on human resource management and accountability. The district completed training for all management and supervisory staff on the new disciplinary standards and procedures and the performance evaluation system.



There has been a noticeable improvement in how supervisors and managers are dealing with serious employee problems. The dismissal rate in District 11 has gone from the lowest in the Department to near the statewide average.



Recommendation 25a. Determine the effectiveness of D11 human resources operations.

Central Office HR staff visited District 11 and provided feedback and direction on staffing needs and changes to HR operations. CO advised the District to fill vacancies based on allocation/staffing ratios, and to ensure Family Services Counselor and Child Protective Investigator positions are assigned to their intended program areas based on the initial allocation of FTE's.

The Human Resources Manager for District 11 was replaced and Central Office staff worked closely with the new manager to bring about change and build an efficient and effective human resource management operation in the district.

Recommendation 25b. Ensure that employees terminated for cause are never rehired within DCF.

Recommendation 25c. Ensure employees who resign in lieu of termination are indicated in the system so as not to be eligible for rehire.

On June 14, 2002, a memo was sent to Executive Leadership team, Regional Director and District Administrators superseding current policy on rehire, CFOP



60-02, Section 7, Step 9(h), and implementing new policy that no hiring authority will reemploy any applicant who has been dismissed, terminated or resigned while pending dismissal or under investigation by the Department with no exceptions. Human Resources staff now complete an intensive form on any applicant who is working or has previously worked for the Department, including getting backup material from the other HR office or from Terminated Records. CF operating procedure 60-02 has been approved and is in place.

Recommendation 25d. Accredit DCF Human Resources staff by the Society of Human Resource Management.

Prior to December of 2002, 26 HR staff had Professional in Human Resources (PHR) or Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) certification through the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). An additional 20 HR staff took the certification exam in December of 2002. The minimum requirements for the HR Manager positions have been revised to require PHR/SPHR certification. It should be noted that most HR functions have been privatized.

Recommendation 23a. Compare the performance and longevity of child welfare staff with degrees in social work or other behavioral sciences vis-à-vis other degreed staff.

The Department contracted with Robin Perry, PhD., Florida State University School of Social Work, to conduct a comparison of performance and longevity of child welfare staff across academic background and training. The study looked at the performance evaluations and longevity of 78.3% of CPI and CPS workers. No differences in the performance evaluations of workers with different educational backgrounds were observed for a variety of tasks/skills, including:

- compliance issues,
- basic skills,
- the writing of case notes,
- court-related matters,
- client contact/visitation,
- administrative roles,
- communicating,
- case plan activities, and
- being a team member.

The only exception was observed with performance evaluation scores associated with professional training and development issues. Here, those with degrees in education scored significantly higher than those with degrees in sociology and criminology on their performance on tasks associated with professional training and development. There was no significant difference in the average performance



scores observed between workers with education degrees and those with degrees in social work, psychology, and business. Finally, statistical models suggest that worker performance and educational background (among those sampled for this study) does not seem to have an effect upon the likelihood that workers will stay or leave employment (for the one-year period of this study).

Recommendation 23b. Determine if caseworker job descriptions are in keeping with national standards for social and child welfare work.

The job descriptions were reviewed in the compensation study by Bearing Point in the winter of 02/03. Standards were not compared in this study to national standards, but jobs and compensation levels were compared to five other states. There is currently a Protective Investigations Retention Workgroup that is looking at workload standards and job descriptions.

Recommendation 23c. Work with Florida universities toward a program where graduates could receive certification as a child welfare specialist.

The Department has worked in collaboration with state universities to coordinate internship programs in conjunction with the DCF training programs to prepare students for employment with the Department. Students/Interns who have completed internship training programs with the Department are given preference in the selection and hiring process. The Department provides stipends to students in all of the public schools of social work in the state that train child welfare professionals.

The schools that participate in the partnership are Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, University of Central Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of West Florida, University of South Florida, and Florida State University. All eight public schools of social work operate "child welfare education" programs. The child welfare education program consists of child protection courses and an internship in a child protection placement. Some of the schools have gotten their child welfare education programs approved as child welfare "certificate" programs. They are all equivalent to certificate programs, but they have not all gone through the official internal process required for "certification" programs.

The Social Work Partnership Program contracts were extended until Dec. 31, 2003. We are in the process of issuing an RFP for the development and delivery of child welfare training. The goal is to have a statewide university/community college consortium to provide regionally-based education and training for college credit to our DCF and CBC trainees. Our pre-service training would be administered by a community college or university and our trainees would receive



post-baccalaureate credit. Some or all of this credit will be in the Social Work departments and in specific child welfare coursework. This should be in effect by July 1, 2004. The RFP also includes participation by the consortium in the Social Work Stipend program and the Student Loan Forgiveness Program (SB 1454). We believe that the child welfare specialist certification will be a natural result of these efforts.

Recommendation 41. Pay caseworkers and supervisors better, based on meritorious performance.

The 2003-04 Appropriations Act included \$30 million for pay increases for front-line Child Welfare and Community-Based Care staff, specifically Family Services Counselors, Child Protective Investigators and both Family Safety and Child Protective Investigator Supervisors.

Proviso language states that the funds “are provided for pay adjustments to the base level of pay for child welfare front-line workers in the Department of Children and Family Services and in lead community-based care agencies. It is the intent of the Legislature that the Department utilize these funds to move the salaries of these workers to the 2001 national Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) average salary of persons carrying out these responsibilities.” The CWLA average mean was \$34,230 for Counselors and \$47,672 for Supervisors. The Department has developed a method to distribute the funds to bring the statewide average well within the CWLA national recommendation.

The Department distributed the pay raises to its employees based on this new competency-based classification and compensation system developed by Bearing Point. The compensation system that was developed is market based and builds a career path for all Child Welfare and Community-Based Care employees. It also links competencies and performance to pay. This system is being used to develop the new compensation ranges required by the proviso.

The pay increases allow the department to raise statewide average salaries to the following new averages, which are comparable to the Child Welfare League of America national averages:

Position	Current Average	New Average
Child Protective Investigator	\$30,700	\$35,200
Child Protective Investigator Supervisor	\$39,500	\$46,600
Family Services Counselor	\$31,100	\$34,000
Family Services Counselor Supervisor	\$38,400	\$44,700



Increases are retroactive to July 1 and appeared in DCF employees' September 29 paychecks. The plan includes the same positions for community-based care and contracted employees.

The Secretary remains committed to improving the employee environment, including the addition of 376 new caseworkers in January 2004, Listening Tours geared toward receiving direct feedback from employees and better tools for caseworkers in the field.

Sheriff's offices providing protective investigation functions also received \$1.6 million for increases for their front-line workers.

Recommendation 42. Make DCF employees selected-exempt under the Service First initiative.

This recommendation was made to the Legislature. Implementation would require approval of the Legislature and the Governor and would also require funding. It should be noted that all Career Service positions that met the criteria for SES were transferred in July of 2001.

**Recommendation 43 a. Address high staff turnover.
Recommendation 48. Fund a supervisory-management course to ensure outstanding management.**

There were 1150 department and community-based care supervisors and managers trained during a series of Managers Retention Conferences. The conferences were designed to create a work environment to increase performance and retention of critical staff and their supervisors. Copies of the book Love'Em or Lose'Em: Getting Good People to Stay by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans were distributed at the conferences. This book is designed to assist with communication, recognition, and mentoring skills vital to sustain a productive workforce.

The department also offers courses for supervisors in Supervisory Effectiveness Training and Quality Case Management Training. The Quality Case Management course is designed to strengthen supervisory case review skills in order to:

- improve the quality of counselor case management and documentation skills and
- ensure that counselors:
 - comply with Federal and state requirements
 - achieve Adoption and Safe Families Act outcomes of child safety, permanence, and well-being.



It is also designed to relate Child Welfare pre-service training to counselor job tasks in order to assist supervisors in facilitating transfer of learning from the classroom to the field.

Research has shown that there are seven behaviors which separate effective managers from less effective managers:

- communication,
- control,
- feedback,
- supervisory focus,
- production,
- coaching and
- an emphasis on people.

These seven core behaviors or practices leading to effective performance management form the foundation of the DCF Supervisory Effectiveness curriculum.

Quality and Accountability

Recommendation 39. Analyze DCF capacity to support field operations and community care providers with quality-assurance, quality-monitoring and fiscal staff.

The Child Welfare Quality Assurance (QA) Plan is a comprehensive approach to quality improvement in child protection programs and is a key element in Florida's federally approved Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The QA Plan focuses on assessing and improving processes and results affecting service delivery, administration and management of direct and contract services. While meeting state and federal standards related to quality assurance and child welfare is important, the ultimate goal is to strengthen practice, services and supports to children and their families.

The QA Plan and process builds on the Federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) by using alike review methods and tools to assess progress and opportunities for improvement on the same outcome areas and indicators.

The process design measures outcomes for children and families in three domains: child safety, child permanency, and child and family well-being. Seven systemic factors are also assessed:

- Statewide Information System,
- Case Review System,
- Quality Assurance System,
- Training,
- Service Array,



- Agency Responsiveness to the Community,
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, and
- Recruitment and Retention.

THREE-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM:

The QA Plan is comprised of a tiered and functional statewide quality improvement approach using a qualitative process that is attentive to improving practice. The tiered system has been structured to ensure quality assurance and improvement activities are defined, implemented and monitored at all levels of the service delivery system. This approach places accountability at all levels to include unit supervisors, contracted service providers, district/region program offices and central office.

Tier 1 is the responsibility of the local service provider (contract provider or Department). Tier 1 reviews are conducted at the direct service (unit) level on a regular and routine basis, including ongoing supervisory review. The focus at this level is looking at specific services and issues. It involves quality improvement processes and activities.

Tier 2 is the responsibility of District and Region administration and the program office. The primary mission is the review of the child welfare programs and regulatory activities using standardized review tools, guidelines and processes. It includes qualitative program reviews on a regular and routine basis using the Child Welfare Integrated Quality Assistance (CWIQA) review tool, as well as validation of the Tier 1 reviews. The Tier 2 process includes peer reviewers who perform case file reviews and case-specific interviews. The activities at this tier are directed both internally to department provided services and externally to contracted service providers. The activities yield quantitative and qualitative data with the focus on performance at a systems level.

Tier 3 is the responsibility of zone or central office Child Welfare Quality Assurance. The primary activity is to perform qualitative reviews of child protection programs using standardized tools, guidelines and processes validating the Tier 2 review findings. Central office or zone Child Welfare Quality Assurance conducts a qualitative review in each district and region annually. The activities at this level are directed both internally to department provided services and externally to contracted service providers. The review process includes peer reviewers, and replicates the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The focus of activities at this tier is outcome based and concentrates on systemic practice improvements.

There are many facets in Tier 3 which:

- Validate findings and quality improvement activities at the district/region program office level.
- Help identify best practices.
- Evaluate processes and outcomes.



- Give essential input to identify systemic issues and process barriers.
- Provide technical assistance.
- Review federal funding compliance requirements

Additionally, Tier 3 activities consist of targeted and special reviews such as child deaths, Florida Abuse Hotline, licensing, appropriateness of referrals to Child Protection Team (CPT), protective investigations, Inspector General assists, etc.

In summary, the three-tiered quality assurance/quality improvement approach focuses on outcomes, quality of services and system improvements. The review tools link to outcomes, performance measures and critical success factors. The QA Plan requires regular and periodic reviews, reports of findings, standardized review tools, ongoing technical assistance, improvement plans and a rigorous process of validation.

Implementation of the QA Plan began in September 2002. The Tier 2 process and review instrument was tested in the Region, Districts 8 and 13. Further revisions are underway to align protective investigations with that of the Sheriffs Peer Review. The Region has been instrumental in the development, testing, revision and training of the Child Welfare Integrated Quality Assurance (CWIQA) review tool.

The 2003 Legislature funded additional positions for Quality Assurance purposes, effective October 1, 2003. The positions provide the Department with the capacity and infrastructure necessary to carry out Tiers 2 and 3.

The Child Protection Practice Improvement Team (CPPIT) formed in June 2003 with the intent of developing a consensus-based local improvement planning format and reporting framework for use in each of our service delivery locales. Team members include our Community-Based Care partners, Sheriffs' offices participating in child protection investigations, district, region and central office representatives. The Team is functioning as the champions of the state's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and Local Program Improvement Plans. The Team will provide technical assistance and guidance throughout the 24 months of the state's PIP. The Team recognizes the key factors in the quality improvement process as stakeholder involvement, external review process, flexibility in design, internal review and self-assessments, case review tools and stakeholder interview guides. The CPPIT Team fully supports the three tier QA process and will continue to provide input and guidance for successful implementation.

The three tiers will be operational during the last three months of 2003. When fully implemented, this approach should result in early detection of performance problems and potential system gaps.

An Oversight and Accountability workgroup is currently looking at contract oversight activities as well as its functional relationship with various quality



assurance activities performed in the department. Since the department's role continues to shift from provider of services to purchaser of services, contract oversight will take on greater importance.

Recommendation 31. Develop performance measures that accurately reflect those outcomes that are reasonably within the control of DCF.
Recommendation 43a. Work with legislature on measurement strategies.

The panel used several measures to illustrate their concerns. The department's new measures of district administrator performance and lead agency performance ameliorate the problems identified by the panel. For example, the panel took issue with counting as open investigations with only a judicial proceeding or criminal investigation pending. The new Child Safety Assessment, incorporated into HomeSafenet, closes investigations upon completion of investigative activities. Investigations are no longer kept open only because of pending judicial handling. Likewise, addressing another concern of the panel, we now measure length of stay in out of home care using entry cohorts so that children in care for a long time would not affect measurement of the performance of current providers.

Recommendation 22. Develop a plan to achieve accreditation in core functions.

All Community Based Care lead agencies are accredited or have plans for achieving accreditation within three to four years of start-up.

Out-of-Home Care: Supporting Foster Parents, Relative and Non-Relative Caregivers:

Recommendation 33. Support Foster Care Review panels.

The department is working with foster care review panels and recommending changes to judicial review language in statute so that the activities of citizen review panels will be eligible for federal reimbursement.

Recommendation 43c. Address foster parent turnover.

Recruitment and retention of foster homes is a continuing priority. Major initiatives include the following.



Provided training, resources and technical assistance to district/region staff, State and Local Foster Parent Associations, Community-Based Care and other contract provider agencies.

- Onsite recruitment/retention training and technical assistance was provided to the districts/region as well as through statewide conference calls. Recruitment and retention needs were identified followed by problem solving and developing strategies to address the needs.
- The foster parents reported difficulty obtaining dental services for children in care. The Department partnered with the Florida Dental Association and the Department of Health to provide children in foster care free dental screenings and treatment. The "Give Kids A Smile" initiative was piloted in seven districts with 446 children receiving dental care. This initiative was so successful that the Florida Dental Association wants to make this an annual event expanding statewide in 2004.

Developed partnerships with state and national organizations to raise public awareness of foster care issues, recruit additional foster families, and increase supports to foster parents.

- One partnership is with Casey Family Programs and The Urban Institute to raise public awareness for National Foster Care Month. The Casey Family Programs provided posters and The Urban Institute produced press releases to highlight foster care.
- Parent education books and videotapes were distributed statewide to foster parents and foster parent association lending libraries.
- Florida provides all licensed foster families and shelter families a quarterly issue of the Fostering Families Today magazine. This educational publication enables a foster parent to receive annually four hours of in-service training hours in the convenience of their home.

Contracted with the Florida State Foster Adoptive Parent Association (FSFAPA) to provide foster parents support and resources.

- During fiscal year 02/03, FSFAPA initiated a toll-free line to offer support to foster parents. FSFAPA accepts inquiries on this line from individuals offering to donate resources for foster families or who are interested in foster parenting.
- Central office staff coordinated with FSFAPA foster parents to participate on a variety of work groups with district/region operations and program offices.
- The association published a quarterly newsletter and conference brochure that provided information for foster parents.
- The association continued to offer foster parents in-service training opportunities at the quarterly seminar training and the State Foster Parent Conference.
- Behavioral training is now an integral part of the basic MAPP training.
- Leadership training has been provided to the local association presidents.
- The Foster Parent Allegation Support Team (FAST) offered support services to foster parents going through an investigation of abuse or neglect. FAST offered in-service training for the FAST volunteers at the quarterly seminar training, State Foster Parent Conference, and a pre-service training for new

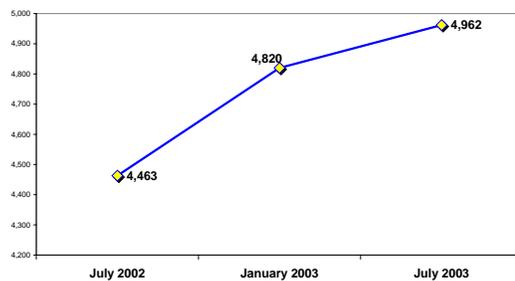


volunteers during June in Sarasota. FAST provides a 24-hour warm line for foster parents requesting support.

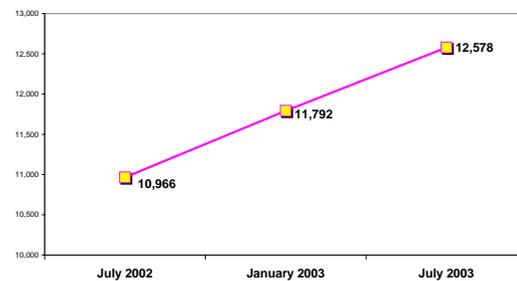
Districts/region continued to offer foster parents support and activities on the local level.

- Monthly support and training groups; support for foster parent travel to local, state, and national training;
- 24-hour on call support staff; liaison or foster family support worker positions who support and advocate for foster parents; newsletters; foster parent recognition banquets; mentor programs;
- Behavioral analysts are available to assist individual families.
- Coordinating community donations and resources for families;
- A Conflict Resolution Panel offers foster parents the opportunity to discuss issues and resolve differences on various levels;
- Local agencies were contracted with to provide training, support and technical assistance in areas such as attachment issues.
- Some CBCs are beginning to involve foster associations in start-up planning.

Licensed Family Foster Homes Have Increased by 11.2% in One Year



The Licensed Capacity in Foster Homes Increased by 14.7%



Recommendation 5. Implement a Foster Care Mediation Board in District 11.

A mediation board has been established in D11 and has been very successful in mediating and resolving issues without having to require mediation board official decisions. This model is being shared across the state for possible replication.

Recommendation 6. Conduct criminal history checks on all new nonrelative, relative, and foster care placements.

According to FDLE records, from January through August 2003, 8482 fingerprints have been submitted on foster care and small group home providers. Additionally, 9550 fingerprints have been submitted on relative and non-relative placements using both paper and ink as well as live scan submissions.



Recommendation 29. Develop policies around the issue of placements with relatives and non-relatives who have a “positive” criminal background check.

The standards of Level 2 screening in s. 435.04 and s. 435.045 are being used. A legislative proposal became a bill that died at the close of the 03 session. A new proposal for 04 has been developed to provide the Department with rule-writing authority for Chapter 435 so that screening standards can be defined.

Recommendation 30. Complete background checks on all existing relative and non-relative caregivers.

The Legislature did not authorize fingerprinting of existing placements.

Recommendation 27. Provide and update relevant medical information to foster parent relative and non-relative placements.
Recommendation 28. Task Force review of DCF policies and procedures with a goal of streamlining, condensing and consolidating policies.

Language has been proposed as part of the rule rewrite that would clarify what medical records to include, who may receive copies, and how often those records need to be updated. There is presently a contract with MAXIMUS and the CWLA to consolidate, eliminate and streamline procedures into child welfare rules. It is expected that the medical information provisions will be addressed in the new rules.

Technology Enhancements: Abuse Hotline

Recommendation 26. Develop a plan to arrange almost-instant hotline access for calling in English, Spanish and Creole.

- The Hotline has hired more counselors who speak foreign languages and provided them salary additives. All shifts are covered.



Technology Enhancements: Home Safenet and Equipment

**Recommendation 8. Determine and prepare legislative budget request on the cost of equipping every caseworker with a laptop.
Recommendation 18 a. Provide caseworkers access to cameras with date stamp capability.**

DCF and CBC staff have been provided with digital cameras with date stamp capability. District 15 developed a stand-alone system for maintaining the photos with the child's HomeSafenet ID that is being implemented statewide. Training materials have been developed. District 15 is doing one-on-one training for districts. October 30 is the expected schedule for all to be converted.

Each protective investigator should by now have a lap top. Budget issues for new positions are appropriated with money for purchase of lap tops.

During FY 02-03, the following equipment was purchased for field staff.

1,931	Cell Phones
2,961	Cameras
52	Lexmark Printers
34	Live Scans
3,430	Headsets and adapters
500	Lexmark Automated Dictation
202	HP Photosmart printers

Recommendation 24. Convene a series of local conferences of HomeSafenet authors, users, IT experts and providers who must learn how to use the system.

Five local conferences were held with frontline HSn users across the state. Recommendations for improvement were discussed and considered.

Developing Partnerships: Pro Bono Attorneys

Recommendation 34. Governor urged to use moral suasion with Florida Bar to recruit more pro bono attorneys for children in DCF's custody.

Governor Bush sent a letter to the President of the Florida Bar asking for assistance in recruiting pro bono attorneys.



Miami-Dade Community Advocacy and Outreach: Developing Law Enforcement Partnerships

Recommendation 35. Both District 11 and law enforcement should jointly review current lease obligations, space needs and staffing to determine how to expand additional co-location and shared responsibilities of child welfare staff and law enforcement officers. DCF caseworkers already are based at police offices in Miami Beach and Homestead.

Co-location has been achieved with law enforcement as follows:

- Homestead;
- Miami Beach;
- City of North Miami Beach;
- Hialeah;
- Coral Gables;
- City of Miami. D11 was given space in the main police station and plans are going forward to introduce CPI staff in select precinct locations.

Discussions continue with Miami-Dade regarding the possibility of their assumption of child protective investigations.

Miami-Dade Community Advocacy and Outreach: Courts

Recommendation 19. By Sept. 1: The District 11 administration should prepare recommendations on how to expand “Family Case Conferencing”. This is now taking place in one court division and one neighborhood in Miami-Dade County.

The District 11 Family Case Conferencing Plan was presented to the BRP on September 23, 2002 and includes the following provisions:

1. Expanding the Miami Model Court Family Decision-Making Conference.

The courts have asked the Department to present recommendations as to how to expand the current Miami Model Project. The district discussed several options and it was decided that without additional funding, the Miami Model Court Project can be expanded to cover all four court divisions as follows:

The existing staff that serves Division 1 will do the same minimum number of Family Group Decision-Making Conferences, but serve all four divisions. They are currently doing a maximum of 12 Family Conferences per month for Division 1,



which means they could do a maximum of three Family Conferences per month, for Divisions 1, 2, 3 and 4.

If additional funding becomes available, the district may replicate the work done in Division 1 by having two units instead of the existing one. Each unit could either serve two Divisions or serve clients by geographic location dividing the county North and South.

Another option with additional funds is to replicate the work done in Division 1 to each of the other divisions, for a total of four units. This would result in a dedicated Family Group Decision-Making unit in each court division. Please note that Division 1 is currently supported by one unit composed of one facilitator, one supervisor, two counselor positions and five CPI positions.

Any expansion plans to add additional units would mean that the staffs attached to these units need to receive training and certification in the Family Group Decision-Making model. The expansion of this program to all four court divisions was implemented March 14.

2. Provide District 11A CPI and CPS counselors with training on Family Team Conferencing/ICA (Clark Neighborhood Partnership conference model) to utilize FTC as a case planning tool. Involvement by the Neighborhood Centers still needs to be pursued.

Six district staff received training on the Individual Course of Action (ICA) process. An additional eight district staff and 22 Community Based Care staff are currently being trained along with Neighborhood Partnership staff.

(Please note that the Miami Model Court Family Group Decision-Making Model and the Family Team Conference/ICA Clark model are two different models of Family Conferencing. Each requires particular training and certification.)

Representing Children in Court: Guardian Ad Litem in Dade County

Recommendation 7 a. Support Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) in reporting the resources needed to have GAL representation for every child in every dependency case in D11.

Recommendation 7 b. Support Guardian Ad Litem in determining what resources are necessary to support administrative, supervisory, space and other infrastructure requirements.

Recommendation 9. Conduct a GAL-District retreat to identify issues and establish mechanisms for conflict resolution.

In District 11:



- GAL staff attend Child Welfare and Community-Based Care (CWCBC) meetings.
- GAL staff attend CWCBC and children’s mental health meeting in Miami.
- GAL/DCF now hold joint planning meetings monthly.
- GAL/DCF exchanged personnel rosters and contact phone numbers.
- GAL/DCF agreed on a process to resolve conflicts on 6/25.
- GAL will host CWCBC supervisor meetings
- GAL representatives participated in training for investigators and counselors
- A meeting was held on December 5, 2002 with the Miami GAL staff and District 11 staff to continue open dialogue for improving relationships and coordination. A schedule of monthly meetings with the GAL has been established in District 11 to insure the stability and reliability of communications.

Miami-Dade Community Advocacy and Outreach: Public Schools

Recommendation 17a. Support Miami-Dade public schools in developing notification procedures for children who miss three consecutive days or are not regularly attending school.

Recommendation 17b. Support Miami-Dade public schools in developing an electronic method for sharing school information consistent with legal requirements.

Miami-Dade school system is resistant to allowing on-line access to their computer network by an outside agency regardless of assurances concerning system integrity. The electronic access system was developed, but not implemented. They do not notify DCF if a child has missed several days of school. This would have been accomplished by the reporting capability of the electronic access system (which 'red flagged' all DCF children, gave them a special 'school' number, and allowed DCF to see all DCF children at a single web site and run reports on failing grades, absenteeism, etc.). Through the School Readiness Coalition, however, district staff is notified if one of the children in their care or supervision does not appear in Day Care.

The school system’s Special Programs Director, who worked with district staff to develop the adaptation of District 10’s School Interagency Agreement and electronic access system, meets regularly with the District 11 Deputy District Administrator to facilitate ad hoc access to school records, to emphasize special consideration for our teens in school to meet RTI requirements, provide special home school transportation when children are moved from one foster placement to another, and basically assist Counselors and Protective Investigators when they encounter Principals who deny them access to children or school records.



Miami-Dade: Quality

Recommendation 11. By Aug. 1: DCF Headquarters should initiate an independent System of Care Review in District 11, facilitated by national consultant Paul Vincent, like those already performed in seven other Florida DCF districts. This should include full involvement by the local Community-Based Care Alliance.

The study was completed on September 12, 2002 and presented to the full panel on September 23, 2002. The District XI Community-Based Care Alliance has established a System of Care Subcommittee to incorporate this and other studies into the ongoing work of this body.

Miami-Dade Community Advocacy and Outreach: CBC Alliance

Recommendation 12. By Aug. 1: The Miami-Dade Community-Based Care Alliance should expand its membership to include significant representation from the business and civic communities, with a goal of enhancing the visibility of and commitment to community-based care.

The CBC Alliance installed additional members during its January 2003 meeting.

Recommendation 21. DCF and the Miami-Dade Community-Based Care Alliance should convene a Children and Families Summit.

The Summit took place on September 18, 2002 and the report submitted to the Blue Ribbon Panel on September 23, 2002.

