

MCWAP Parent Survey Results & Workgroup Recommendations

In 2019, the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel's (MCWAP) Parent Survey Workgroup conducted a survey of parents who had been involved with Child Protective Services (CPS). In 2020, MCWAP submitted the survey findings, plans for future work in response to the survey, and recommendations to the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). It should be noted that the sample size of the survey group was 65 parents. While this summary presents an overview of the results and the Panel's response and next steps, due to the small sample size, it is not possible to draw system wide conclusions.

Results Overview

Strengths

Caregivers indicate several areas where CPS demonstrated strengths, including clarity for involvement, reliable meeting attendance, and overall creation of a safer situation for the child. Specifically, most survey participants indicated that the Family Plan included clear reasons why CPS was involved with the family, caseworkers were dependable when it came to being on time and showing up for commitments, and caregivers generally thought their child was safer after CPS involvement.

Opportunities

Respect

Respect, empathy, and compassion are the foundation to effectively work with children and their families. Parents that responded to this survey said the top priority for change in the CPS response was to see more empathy, respect, and/or compassion shown toward parents and families. Some parents expressed that their CPS caseworker was supportive and helped them overall.

“Start by treating people with respect.” – Parent Survey Participant

Communication

Many parents reported challenges staying up to date on their CPS case. Their concerns included infrequently meeting to review progress, inflexibility in scheduling family team meetings, and lack of clarity on their next steps. Even with these challenges, parents did note that the

The Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP) is one of Maine's Citizen Review Panels of professional and private citizens responsible for determining whether state and local agencies are effectively administering child protective and child welfare responsibilities.

development of the family plan was an area of strength where they were able to contribute, agreed with many steps in the plan, and understood the reasons why CPS was involved.

Knowledge of Parents' Rights

Knowledge of a parent's rights and responsibilities in the CPS process is closely connected to communication. However, this topic also concerns what resources and rights are given to parents. The survey showed that CPS caseworkers want to inform the parents they are working with but perhaps need to repeat knowledge in multiple or more effective ways.

Action Steps

MCWAP is working with OCFS to address the above concerns through the following action steps:

- Sharing the survey results with parents, caregivers, and OCFS staff.
- Examining current CPS policies and practices around communication strategies and expectations, inclusion of parent/caregiver voice and perspective, and parents and other caregivers' understanding of their rights.
- Reviewing OCFS' quality assurance work to better understand how parents and other caregivers are involved in the case process, the areas of improvement that have been identified internally, and efforts to address these challenges.
- Scheduling and administering the parent survey moving forward, including making improvements upon expanding the geographical representation of respondents, administration to tribal communities, and translating the survey to improve outreach to New Mainers and other non-English speaking families with CPS experience.



Conclusion

Due to the small sample size of respondents, system wide conclusions cannot be made. Despite this, MCWAP takes seriously the issues highlighted by the participants and values the strengths noted as well. MCWAP is committed to improving the child welfare system. In direct response to these concerns the Panel will continue its work to share results, partner with OCFS, examine CPS policies, and re-administer this survey on a periodic basis.