MCWAP Parent Survey Findings & Recommendations

2024

In 2024, the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel's (MCWAP) conducted a survey of parents who were involved with Child Protective Services (CPS). 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). This summary presents an overview of the results and the Panel's response and next steps.

Overview

Twenty eight surveys are included in the survey findings below. The majority of respondents identified as female (89%). Approximately 18% of the surveys were from Cumberland County followed by Kennebec County. Most respondents (61%) were currently involved with CPS with an additional 25% indicating involvement in the past year. The top three reasons noted for CPS involvement were Domestic Abuse and Violence, Drug or Alcohol Use, and Neglect of the Child.

Parents reported mixed experiences with the many different and often complex components of the child welfare system and that more support with problem solving could increase family success and help them reach their goals.

Communicating Key Information & Expectations

82% responded that their rights were **not** fully and clearly explained by the caseworker who did the removal

65% responded that their child protection worker explained why they were involved with their family.

72% responded that their rights were clearly and fully explained to them by their attorney

50% responded that the GAL/CASA had equal expectations for them and the other parent

Relationships that Support Family Success

Experience of Family Team Meetings

Preparation

74% responded that their caseworker **did not** spend time with them to prepare for Family Team Meetings

Post meeting

69% respondents stated that their caseworker **did not** spend time with them after their meetings to review what they needed to do next.

Goal attainment

65% respondents stated that their caseworker **did not** help them to solve problems that made it easier to reach their goals

What We Have Learned

The main themes from the last three parent surveys over the past six years are similar. Those themes center on communication and understanding of parents' rights.

Communication
OCFS is doing well with basic access to communication by providing parents with the name and telephone number of their caseworker. However, OCFS may be more challenged in communicating with parents on a deeper level.

Parents expressed concerns about not having enough preparation or follow up around Family Team Meetings and a desire to have more opportunity to contribute to the family plan and goals.

Knowledge of Parents' Rights
Parents do not have a full and clear understanding of their rights at removal, which may impact a parent's relationship and engagement with OCFS going forward. This may be the result of OCFS not providing complete information and/or challenges with parents retaining the information due to high levels of stress leading up to and at the time of removal.

This feedback offers an opportunity to find more effective ways to inform, communicate with, and engage parents, including repeating information and checking for understanding.

Expectations
It is worth noting that a majority of respondents, most of whom are mothers, do not feel that they are being treated fairly by the Guardian ad Litem, specifically that there were not equal expectations for them and the other parent.

Action Steps & Response to Parent Feedback

MCWAP and OCFS appreciate the feedback that parents have provided and use it to advise practice and policy. In response to parent feedback MCWAP has:

- Supported the development of informational classes for parents called *Child Protective Services 101: For Parents, By Parents* with Maine's Justice for Children Task Force and The Opportunity Alliance.
- Initiated Father Engagement Listening Session

Next Steps

While there were numerous examples of processes working well, this brief focuses on areas of most concern where improvements can be made.

In response, MCWAP is committed to:

- **Providing families and providers with information about the new Family Team Meeting Policy to support parent and family participation;**
- **Conducting a study on the ways that families are being provided information about their rights and responsibilities;**
- **Improving the survey design so that the questions are more specific with measurable data points;**
- **Developing a survey distribution plan with increased outreach and accessibility.**

*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.*