

The Review

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**Director, Kim
Hawekotte**

**FCRO Advisory
Committee
Members:**

Craig Timm
Chair, Omaha

Sandra Kruback
Co-Chair, North Platte

Michelle Hynes
Dakota City

Sheree Keely
Omaha

Elizabeth Neeley
Seward

From the Desk of the Director

How time flies when you are having fun! The past two months have been extremely busy but the good news is that I am feeling settled in and a part of the flow of good work that we are accomplishing.

We have been working very closely with the legislature regarding needed statutory changes, with DHHS to ensure that needed reform efforts continue and with the judicial system to make certain that all parties have the needed information for the benefit of our children. I am very blessed to work with such dedicated staff and volunteers.

Our local review board members are at the heart of what the FCRO does every day for children in out-of-home care. What many people do not know, is that every local board member serves in a volunteer capacity and donates countless hours every year advocating in this unique way for Nebraska's foster children and their families. I guarantee that this is the topic of every conversation that I have with people.

Because of you...

Someone will have enough to eat tonight.

Someone will have clothes to wear.

Someone will have shelter.

Someone will receive medical care.

Someone will learn the skills they need to survive and succeed.

Someone knows there's at least one person in this world that cares.

We are very proud of the Quarterly Report which was submitted on March 15, 2013. Much of the hard work done by our local board members comes alive in the cumulative data for the Quarterly Report. This data helps drive the reform of the child welfare and juvenile justice system.

We are very excited about the Summer Workshops. We know that all children who enter out-of-home care suffer from some degree of trauma. Traumatic stress is about survival-in-the-moment.

One of the most devastating effects of traumatic stress is its effect on children's ability to think into the future since they are fighting for their lives in the present. We also know that parents of these children may come from traumatic situations. These Summer Workshops will assist all of us in looking at cases through a "trauma-informed lens".

The summer workshop will also have sessions that inform us about the legal system and how it functions. We will have a cultural panel to share with us the similarities and differences in our cultures.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Summer Workshops.

April 15-22 is National Volunteer Week so I want to take this time to reach out to each and every one of you to thank you for your role in helping move children towards permanency and ensuring their safety and well-being. ***We could not do this work without you.***

One of my favorite authors as a child was Dr. Seuss. In watching The Lorax last weekend I was reminded of a quote that is true for each one of you:

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Things aren't going to get better, they're NOT!"

My door is always open!

Best Wishes,



FCRO Advisory Committee Update

Advisory Committee Members
at the State Capitol for their
Confirmation Hearing



Sandy Kruback Co-Chair



Michelle Hynes



Elizabeth Neeley

Thank you Local Board Members for the countless hours you provide each month advocating for the children in Nebraska's child welfare system. We look forward to meeting local board members at some point during our term of office.

There are five FCRO Advisory Committee Members. Elizabeth Neeley brings expertise on data management as our data representative. Sheree Keely is a community member at-large and brings a wealth of expertise in business. The other three members, Sandy Kruback, Michelle Hynes and Craig Timm are active in their professional lives and serve as local review board members like yourselves. We understand the personal commitment it takes to attend the board meeting each month - even when we might have something personal we'd like to do - we make this board meeting our priority because we know how important it is to be there to review these cases. *Thank you for also making your board meeting a priority!*

Equally important is that we continue to be educated on the issues that impact Nebraska children and their families. According to NE Law 43-1317 training is compulsory for FCRO local board members so please take advantage of training opportunities. FCRO Summer Workshops will focus on Trauma Informed aspects of care. This is knowledge staff and local board members need in order to review the cases from a trauma - informed perspective, and for reviewing cases from an unbiased frame of mind. We hope to see you there!

*Again, our many thanks for all you do for our children!
Craig, Sandy, Michelle, Elizabeth and Sheree*

Legislative Updates

The following bills have been prioritized and
should be voted on by the Unicameral!

LB265 (Coash) - Change foster care licensure and kinship home and relative home provisions

LB269 (Campbell) - Change provisions relating to children and families and the Children's Commission

LB530 (Dubas) - Add, change, and eliminate provisions relating to foster care reimbursements

LB561 (Ashford) - State findings and intent for changes to the juvenile justice system and a funding mechanism

LB464 Allows for concurrent original jurisdiction with separate juvenile court and district for (4), (7), or (11) of section 43-247.

LB216 (McGill, Dubas) - Adopt the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act (extending foster care services for age 19 to age 21 through a voluntary agreement with the young adult former ward).

LB577 Requires Neb. Medicaid to add the newly eligible adult population under ACA to Neb. Medicaid Plans.

LB556 (McGill, Ashford, Dubas) Telehealth services for children through public schools, including behavioral health services.

For updates, or to watch hearings online through live video streaming, go to <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/>



State Capitol
News

Volunteer Spotlight:

Local Review Board Members Recognized for their Service

Kay is motivated to serve on her local boards by the importance of the work. "Our case reviews provide another level of oversight for children in the foster care system."

Kay McMeen serves on two local boards in Omaha and Jennifer our Review Specialist cannot say enough good things about her. "Kay's attendance is excellent! She comes to meetings prepared, always has the cases read and findings done and is conscientious regarding her work. Kay is an extremely compassionate person and is always looking at the best interest of each child she reviews and has a nurturing, gentle way about her."

Kay is trained to do Project Permanency visits and does them frequently. She has done two in the last month alone – one with a foster parent/child and one with that child's biological parents during a visit so our board could get perspective regarding the bond between the child and her biological family. Kay shared that she and another board member, Curt Harrington, do project permanency visits together and have a great system going. "Curt meets with the foster parent primarily and asks questions and observes interactions between the child and the foster parent." We learned that Kay gets right down on the floor and plays with the kids! She engages them and provides them with gifts and life books. **Kay LOVES doing project permanency visits!**

When asked what motivates her to serve on a local board Kay stated "This is a worthwhile use of my time. There are too many children in the foster care system and these case reviews provide another level of oversight." Kay wants new local board members to know that "this is important work and to do it right you need make the time to review the case thoroughly before the meetings." Kay also shared that as a citizen reviewer we need to come to the table without biases. "Not all children come from a middle class situation. It may not be a perfect home setting but it is their home and their family. Our role is to review the case to ensure that "home" is safe, stable and nurturing. They need access to education, food, clean clothing, and be free from abuse. If the child cannot return home then we need to ensure that an alternative placement is a safe and nurturing environment that will provides permanency."

Kay not only serves on two boards, but frequently volunteers to help out in the office with filing, sorting, whatever is needed of her. Kay does not wait to be asked if help is needed – she says "I have free time – what do you need me to do?" Thanks Kay!!



Marcia wants children to know there are strangers out there that care about them and their situation. "Serving on a local review board gives me opportunities to review children's cases and to make clear and informed recommendations that will improve the lives of these children so they can look to the future with hope."

Marcia Fouraker has served on the Fremont Board since 1997. She was an educator for 36 years and has a Master's in Guidance and Counseling. Marcia is now "retired" which gives her an opportunity to volunteer full-time as an advocate for children and families.

Marcia has a warm and caring personality that makes participants at local board meetings feel welcome and listened to. In her work with the local review board Marcia also volunteers to do Project Permanency visits and she is the FCRO representative on the Dodge County Team for the "Through the Eyes of a Child Initiative".

Marcia attends trainings in order to stay as current as possible so that her board recommendations are based on new evidence-based research and best-practices. "Research is constantly being done regarding mental health, family dynamics, early childhood, etc., so I need to stay current. You can't base your recommendations on 20 year old knowledge. In training I learn from local and national presenters and have an opportunity to network with others that advocate for children."

Marcia is a strong advocate for children and well respected in Dodge County. She is an active member of the Early Childhood Coalition that works to assist low income families with young children in a preventive manner with an overall goal of ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Marcia serves as the President of the Nebraska Affiliate of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences made up of FCS educators and extension FCS educators. These educators continue to work on behalf of children and families. Marcia also provides nutrition education--in PE classes at all Fremont elementary schools and at the YMCA teaching (with their staff) parents about healthy lifestyles. She is one busy lady!

We are pleased to have Marcia as one of our dedicated local board members!



Jo volunteers 35-40 hours of her time each month to serving the needs of children in out-of-home care through her work with the FCRO.

Jo McGinn has served on the local review board in Lincoln since 2000. Jo also served on our State Foster Care Review Board from 2004 to 2008. Until 4 years ago Jo was a local pharmacist so she is great to have around to ask questions regarding medication usages. Since retirement Jo has served on 2 local boards and volunteers in our Lincoln office 8 hours a week.

When asked why she serves on a board her answer was simple. "I grew up in a family where I knew I was loved and my children grew up in a home where they were given love. Children in out-of-home care deserve the same opportunity to feel loved, whether it is in the home of their bio-parents, their foster parents, adoptive parents, or someone who offers to provide guardianship.

Jo's message to other volunteer board members is to take whatever training is offered and attend every board meeting. "These children count us to be committed board members. Our involvement in the review process is key to a thorough case review as we each offer an important perspective." She also reminds board members to "Keep an open mind – Some parents may initially appear unsuitable to parent but given a little time and necessary services you may be surprised at how well they turn themselves around." Jo says that when she is reviewing a case she looks for "parental compliance with services, their pattern of visitation, and for a willingness to cooperate and to do whatever it takes to get their children home."

During her time volunteering in the office, Jo has gathered statistics and reported on issues such as older youth in out-of-home care, and on psychotropic medications. Jo does whatever is needed by our staff in the office. She is extremely valued and appreciated!

Thank you Jo for your years of service and dedication!



Sandy serves on 2 local boards in North Platte and was appointed to the State FCRO Advisory Committee by the Governor last August.

"My work on the Advisory Committee has multiplied my knowledge by leaps and bounds. By the few things I have seen, I think that our work is heading the FCRO in the right direction.

Sandy Kruback has served on a local board in North Platte for 17 years and last August was appointed by Governor Heineman to serve on the FCRO State Advisory Committee.

Sandy shared that her reason for applying to serve on a local board so many years ago was that she saw children and teens who did not have the security and safety of home, and that their personal necessities and educational needs were not being met. "I became aware of their home situations and knew some of these children were moved into foster care placements when "home" wasn't working for them. Sometimes children were able to transition back home, but not always. In those cases children stayed in foster care until permanent homes could be found.

When I retired from accompanying the school choir I decided that volunteering on a local foster care review board would allow me to learn more about how the foster care system worked. I wanted to learn more about what services were being provided so that when possible children could reunify with parents, and if not able to go home, what was next for them.

My work on the local board allows me to have a hand in moving children towards permanency. Over the years I've been able to follow cases and see the outcome. I've reviewed cases where children have been able to successfully return home to parents and I've reviewed children's cases who couldn't return home to bio parents, but found a permanent home through guardianship or adoption.

I've also witnessed a lot of change to the child welfare system. What I know for sure is that our written case review findings and recommendations to the legal parties make a difference in the outcomes for children. Also through Project Permanency visits we are able to provide information to foster parents and see for ourselves that placements are safe and in the best interest of the child.

Sandy points out that being on a local board is a lot of work. "There is a lot of reading and we have to make tough decisions." She reminds board member to rely on their Review Specialist for quality, up to date case information and on-going support. "Our work is so important. Attend all the webinars, workshops and training you can to build your knowledge!"

We appreciate you Sandy! Thank you for serving children in so many ways every day!

DATA CORNER:

The Foster Care Review Office released its Quarterly Report to the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee on March 15, 2013.

The Report contains findings and recommendations to improve the child welfare infrastructure.

Positive trends:

- A significant decrease in the number of children (600 children) in out-of-home placements when comparing December 31, 2011, to December 31, 2012.
- A significant decrease in the number of children placed in care for the first time having more than one caseworker (from 92% in 2011 to 86% in 2012).

Areas needing improvement:

- **Length of time in out-of-home care remains an issue.**
 - The average length of stay for children in out-of-home placements increased from 459 days in 2011 to 515 days in 2012.
 - 22% of the children who first entered out-of-home care during 2011 were still in care as of Feb. 24, 2013. This means that in 15 to 27 months the issues that led to these children's removal from the home had yet to be resolved.
- **The rate of re-entry into out-of-home care needs to be reduced.**
 - The re-entry rate for all children returning to out-of-home placements across all Service Areas was 38%, which is consistent with prior years.
- **The number of placement changes need to be reduced.**
 - Statewide data shows that 46% of the children had 4 or more placements during their first time in out-of-home placement.
- **Shelter placements are lasting too long.**
 - On December 31, 2012, there were 91 children in shelter placements with 89% of these children in the 13-18 age range. Only 33% of these youth were in shelter under one month and 37% of these children were in shelters 3 months or longer.
- **Caseworker changes remain an issue across all Service Areas and ages of children.**

The FCRO makes the following recommendations to the child welfare system:

- Continue improvements to ensure that positive trends persist.
- Collaborate with DHHS and private providers to determine why children are changing placements and what is needed to stabilize children's placements.
- Develop a plan to improve data systems.
- Complete a collaborative analysis of why youth are re-entering out-of-home care to determine next steps.
- Assure children age 13-18 (the largest age group of children in out-of-home care) and their families receive needed and age-appropriate services.
- Provide crisis stabilization services in three key areas:
 - 1) As early intervention to prevent a child's removal from the home,
 - 2) When youth transition home and maintain them safely in that home, and
 - 3) To support foster homes and reduce placement disruptions.
- Complete a collaborative analysis of why time in out-of-home care is different across service areas. As part of this analysis, identify the factors that reduce time out-of-home care.

The report can be found at:

<http://www.fcro.nebraska.gov/pdf/publications/annualreport/2012/fcro-annual-report.pdf>

Local Board Updates



Throughout all the child welfare system change these past few years, our dedicated local board member volunteers across the State have continued to review cases and promote individual children's best interests.

In each newsletter we will randomly "spotlight" local board members so you can learn more about each other. Look out! You may be next!

In 2012 volunteers conducted 4,675 reviews.
In 2012 volunteers donated over 36,500 hours.

Thank you for giving your time to serve as a local review board member!

Tips & Tools

Commend Those Doing Well!

There has been a lot of change in every aspect of the child welfare and juvenile justice system that has had an effect on everyone from children, foster parents, parents, relatives, GALs, case managers, CASA, and numerous providers. Let's remember to commend those who are doing a good job and acknowledge their efforts in making the child's best interest their priority. You can commend these individuals in your recommendations, through a note, or both.

Make Specific Recommendations

By stating "the board is concerned" about an issue in written recommendations does not assist the key stakeholders. Everyone is "concerned". Judges and other legal parties to the case want specific recommendations regarding what can be done to eliminate the problem. This is the key to ensuring our expert voice is heard and followed.

Each month, as local reviewers you spend hours poring over case materials in preparation for your board meeting. When doing so, jot down questions and "concerns" that jump out at you. Also make a list of recommendations that you think can be made in the report to address the issues. Doing so provides vital information to the courts and other legal parties from the local board's unique and valuable perspective as a multi-disciplinary group focused specifically on the best interests of the child.

The findings and barriers you identify are coded, input into the FCRO's tracking system, and used to provide regional and statewide aggregate data that is provided to the Courts, DHHS, policy makers and other key stakeholders.

As you make your recommendations and findings, just remember how your work as local board members positively impacts not only individual children's cases but they also help to improve the child welfare and juvenile justice system. Thank you for everything you do for children – You truly make a difference!

Websites

Websites that may be beneficial to you as you strive to learn more about children's issues are included below for your convenience.

The Kids Count Annual Report is available at:
<http://voicesforchildren.com/kids-count>

Look for resources or materials specific to FCRO local board members at: www.fcro.nebraska.gov

Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative:
<http://www.throughtheeyes.org>

Center for Children, Families, and the Law:
<http://ccfl.unl.edu/>

Answers 4 Families: www.answers4families.org/

Partnering 4 Students: www.partnering4students.org

Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Families Association:
www.nfapa.org

Calendar of Events

Foster Care Review Office

521 S. 14th St.
Suite 401
Lincoln, NE 68508

PHONE:
(402) 471-4420
800-577-3272 (NE Only)

FAX:
(402) 471-4437

E-MAIL:
fcro.contact@nebraska.gov

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.fcro.nebraska.gov

FCRO Summer Workshops

May 30, 2013 Lincoln *New Date!*

June 5, 2013 Omaha

June 20, 2013 Norfolk

July 16, 2013 Scottsbluff

July 18, 2013 North Platte

July 25, 2013 Grand Island

Sign-in and Networking from 8:00 to 9:00. *Resource tables will be available.* Workshops will be held from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. A special meeting will be held from 3:15 to 4:15 pm for local board members.

**Workshops will include a variety of topics including legal, cultural awareness, trauma informed care, poverty, and updates to legislation. Additional content will be added so look for updates on our website.*

Please RSVP to mary.fumas@nebraska.gov
402-471-4665 or 800-577-3272

New Board Member Training

Omaha:

~~April 11th & 18th~~ **Postponed**
September 19th & 26th

Lincoln:

~~April 9th & 23rd~~ **Postponed**
September 10th & 17th
5:30 pm – 8:30 pm
FCRO Office 5th Floor

Greater Nebraska: Individual trainings are on-going, as needed. Additional local board members are needed for North Platte, Scottsbluff, Lexington and Kearney!

Please help us to recruit new members who will add diversity of culture and expertise to our current boards across the state. The new application packet is available on our website.

Conferences and Trainings from our Partners

Please contact your Review Specialist or Mary Fumas at mary.fumas@nebraska.gov for a full list of training opportunities, sites and times for training in your area. There are a number of free or low cost opportunities for training being held across the state.

FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE

521 S. 14th St. STE 401
Lincoln, NE 68508-2707

70-00-00