

City of Alexandria, Virginia

15  
12-10-02

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 5, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER <sup>S</sup>

SUBJECT: FOURTH STATUS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

---

**ISSUE:** Receipt of the fourth status report on implementation of the recommendations of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA).

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the City Council receive this report.

**BACKGROUND:** On June 12, 2001, City Council received the CWLA report that reviewed the death of Katelynn Frazier who had been in the custody of the Department of Human Services. The CWLA had been asked to review the tragic death of Katelynn in order to assist the City in examining the policies and practices of its child welfare system, and to recommend improvements that would help the City protect its vulnerable children. The League's report contained a number of recommended improvements in the areas of policy, practice, and procedure. Staff gave status reports on the implementation of these improvements to City Council on September 15, 2001, January 22, 2002, and June 25, 2002. City Council reviewed the reports and requested continued progress updates.

**DISCUSSION:** The Department of Human Services has continued to make progress in its implementation of the CWLA recommendations. The major areas of change are discussed below, and cover activities that have occurred since June 25, unless otherwise noted. A statement of all the League's recommendations and the implementation status of each is attached (Attachment I).

Structured Risk Assessments. The department has implemented structured risk and safety assessment protocols for continuous use from the time a child enters the child welfare system until permanency is achieved. These extensive assessment tools were developed with the assistance of the National Resource Center on Child Maltreatment, a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and by the Child Welfare Institute, a nationally recognized leader in the provision of consultation services to state and local child welfare and human services agencies.

Use of the new tools began January 22, 2002. In all new cases, risk and safety assessments begin with the entrance of the family into the child welfare system. For existing cases, the risk and safety assessment process began in conjunction with service plan reviews which are required at a minimum of every six months. Barry Salovitz, Director of Program Development at the Child Welfare Institute, continues to provide training and consultation. In July 2002, training was provided for the child welfare supervisors on effective supervision of the risk and safety protocols. In August 2002, Alicia Caputo, Psychologist, and two senior social workers were trained to provide effective risk and safety assessment training to new staff. Currently, all but two new staff members have been trained on the risk and safety assessment protocols and their training is scheduled for December 2002.

Risk and safety assessments are used to direct and plan services to eliminate unacceptable risk to children and to improve family functioning. A risk and safety assessment is an analysis of the situation to determine the family's ability to care for the child, and, in the broad sense is looking at: (1) the risk related behaviors or conditions the child is or may be subject to (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, lack of parenting skills, lack of understanding of normal child development); (2) family strengths and resources to protect the child; (3) whether or not the family understands what brought them to the attention of the department; and (4) the functioning of the family unit and other significant circumstances that may affect the family.

Twenty-three different risk factors are evaluated to determine the overall risk rating ( high risk, moderate risk, low risk or no risk). Examples of the 23 factors include: (1) the severity of the abuse and neglect, (2) the child's behavior, (3) the vulnerability of the child, (4) parental substance abuse, (5) previous history of abuse and neglect, and (6) domestic violence.

Cases assessed as high risk pose the greatest likelihood that abuse or neglect will re- occur. The case plan in this instance is designed to minimize risk ( either removal of the child from the family or increased visits to the home if the child remains with the family and additional outside resources, such as, home based services, and mentors assigned to the case ) and to provide treatment for the family. Whether the child returns to, or stays with, the family is a factor of how well the family responds to treatment. Cases that pose moderate to no risk are those which have a lesser degree of, or no ascertainable, risk to the child and where the family's strengths can be utilized to minimize the risk.

Currently, 276 total risk and safety assessment protocols have been completed. This number includes 213 initial risk and safety assessments, 36 risk and safety re-assessments and 27 permanency planning protocols. Of the 213 initial risk and safety assessments that were completed, 31 cases were determined to be high risk, 77 were moderate risk, 59 were low risk, and 46 were determined to have no risk. Of the 36 risk and safety re-assessments that have been completed, only 6 were determined to be at high risk, 8 were determined to be moderate risk, 13 were low risk, and 9 had no risk. The permanency planning protocol is completed when a child is returning home or being placed with relatives. The protocol is presented at a collaboration meeting that involves all key parties to the case, including foster parents, attorneys for the parties, guardians ad litem, service providers, and Court Appointed Special Advocates. Of the 27 permanency planning protocols completed, 10 children were returned to their parents and 17 were placed with a relative.

Mr. Salovitz will conduct an evaluation of the risk and safety protocols beginning in December. The evaluation will include a comprehensive review of: 1) 50 risk and safety assessment protocols and 2) staff surveys regarding the worker's understanding of the risk and safety assessment protocol and how it is implemented in case plans and used in decision making. Mr. Salovitz will also observe the supervisor's consultation with the social workers on their risk and safety assessments to assure consistent application of policy. Use of the risk and safety assessments aids staff in analyzing child safety and risk to the child, positively impacting service planning and case outcomes.

"New Eyes" Policy. On June 25, City Council approved "New Eyes" policy revisions. The original policy stated that any injury, suspicious or not (including any bruise or mark), to a child in foster care must be reviewed by a social worker who is not associated with the foster care case. This policy is a separate and distinct policy from the CPS requirement that all suspicious injuries to a child be the subject of a full CPS investigation and it is in addition to the policy which requires that any complaint of abuse or neglect of a child in an active foster care case be investigated by a social worker not associated with the case. The "New Eyes" policy was designed to increase the objectivity of the assessment of injuries to foster children and to provide for multiple perspectives in a case.

Two revisions were made to the policy as a result of City Council action on June 25. While any injuries to a foster child in the care of a natural parent will continue to be assessed under the "New Eyes" policy, the natural parents will also now be required to report injuries under their court ordered service plan. This change emphasizes a "New Eyes" assessment of injuries sustained by foster children while in the home of a natural parent, where risk of abuse and neglect is greatest. The second revision is to complete a "New Eyes" assessment on foster children in a foster home only in the case of serious injuries or when a parent, social worker or foster parent requests a review. A "serious injury" is one which requires medical attention.

These changes, while they narrow the scope of the "New Eyes" policy, acknowledge and address the fact that the risk of abuse or neglect is greatest while the child is in the care of the natural parent, not the foster parent. It also recognizes that many checks and balances already exist as to foster parents, including the requirement to log all injuries of foster children and to complete monthly observation forms.

Since the policy revisions went into effect July 1, eleven children in eight families are either visiting or are in a trial placement in their natural homes. These families are subject to the new provision requiring that natural parents report any injuries sustained as part of their court ordered service plan. The department is monitoring the policy changes to assure that the intent of the "New Eyes" policy to increase protection for children is met.

Review of High-Risk Cases. Fairfax, Arlington and Alexandria Social Services staffs continue to provide inter-jurisdictional reviews of high-risk cases in each jurisdiction. These reviews are

conducted quarterly, and occur in February, May, August and November of each year. This quarterly review provides an objective review of high-risk child welfare cases to assure that best practices are provided. Additionally, the review teams identify barriers to service and brainstorm alternate service approaches. All agencies have benefitted from the increased sharing of information and expertise and this collaborative model is engendering interest for possible use in other parts of the State. Currently, Alexandria has participated in five quarterly reviews beginning in November 2001, and the team has reviewed a total of 40 Alexandria cases.

Strengths of the social work practiced in these 40 cases include: intensive staff contacts with families; thorough assessments; extensive work to find placements or services; multiple services provided; services accessed quickly; and a high level of commitment by the social workers. Some of the barriers to services noted were: newer staff lacked knowledge of the extent of available community services; the Family Assessment and Planning Team process (FAPT) at times slowed access to services; access to mental health services was hindered by long waiting lists; lack of thoroughness of some mental health evaluations; and difficulty obtaining court testimony from private providers. The department has overcome the mental health barriers noted through the use of the new psychologist in the Department of Human Services and the increased communication that occurs in the monthly collaboration meetings with Mental Health. More emphasis has been placed on the training of new staff in local resources and the FAPT process issue was referred to the FAPT coordinator for review to determine if this is a systemic issue. The department is also exploring how to engage private providers in the court process. Further barriers included a lack of resources in three areas: a locally operated facility to provide random drug screens; lack of Vietnamese service providers; and lack of residential sex offender programs. The lack of local service providers in these three areas was addressed by using providers in other jurisdictions. Of the 40 cases reviewed, the reviewers overall concurred with the plan for all of the cases presented.

Monthly Administrative Reviews. In November 2001, the department began conducting monthly administrative reviews. These reviews are conducted by the Director of Social Services, the Chief of Services, and other supervisors not associated with child welfare services to ensure that new policies are being implemented, and that best practices are being promoted in all cases. The reviews focus on case documentation and the proper implementation of new policies such as the risk and safety assessment protocols and the supervisory reviews. At this time, 104 reviews have been conducted. Twenty-nine percent (30 cases) were rated as excellent, 43% (45 cases) were rated as good, 24% (25 cases) were rated as adequate, 4% (4 cases) were rated as poor, needing improvement. After the monthly reviews are conducted all information is given to the Chief of Services and the supervisors who address the concerns that are noted.

Criminal Record & State Registry Checks. The Child Welfare Partnership initiated, and the City and its legislative delegation obtained, legislation in the 2002 General Assembly giving the City, and jurisdictions across the Commonwealth, increased authority to conduct criminal background checks on all adults involved in child welfare cases. The law requires local social service departments to perform criminal history and child abuse records checks in any case in which the

department is considering placing a child with an adult (including returning a child to a birth parent) on an emergency, temporary, or permanent basis. Background checks are also required for all adults residing in the household where the child is to be placed.

Other enacted legislation strengthens the law that determines when reunification is inadvisable which shortens the time frame for permanency decisions for affected children. Effective July 2002, local departments of social services can proceed more quickly in placing a child for adoption or in permanent foster care if a court finds that reunification is inadvisable because seriously harmful behavior toward the child or other children (e.g., abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, severe abuse, or sexual abuse) has occurred.

Additionally, a new State policy became effective March 2002 that established access to criminal background checks through the Non-Criminal Justice Interface System (NCJI). In non-emergency situations, local workers can obtain information through the NCJI accessed through the Virginia State Police website. In an emergency situation, law enforcement can still conduct immediate criminal record searches through the Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN). These new state policies help Alexandria to conduct background checks more efficiently.

When there is a need to conduct a background check in a state, other than Virginia, workers must contact the state police in that state directly, or contact the Virginia State Police for information about arranging for National Crime Information Center (NCIC) background checks. At this time, out of state information on individuals can not be obtained from VCIN or NCJI.

Case Collaboration. Case collaboration occurs prior to the reunification of any foster child and involves all key parties to the case, including foster parents, attorneys for the parties, guardians ad litem, service providers, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). With the implementation of the structured risk and safety assessments, the case collaboration process now includes a review by all parties of the permanency planning protocol that was specifically developed to be used with reunification plans, and requires sign-off by all participants in the collaboration meeting. Formalizing the process has helped assure that all partners have been fully apprized of the reunification plan and the potential risks, and any reservations are discussed and addressed. Review of the permanency planning protocol shows clearly that multiple issues were considered and evaluated. The department has held 27 collaboration meetings since July 2001.

In addition to the above, monthly case collaboration meetings with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services are continuing and are very effective in improving service planning. These meetings include discussion of the initial referral of cases and continued joint cases. Due to the success of the mental health collaboration meetings, the department is setting up monthly meetings with CASA. These formal CASA collaboration meetings will begin in December, and will focus on specific case concerns. Additionally, CASA and the department are collaborating to present a co-training aimed at assisting both CASA volunteers and child welfare services workers in understanding each other's roles.

Staffing. On September 24, 2002, City Council approved the request to hire a full time recruiter to increase foster homes for Alexandria's children, and the department is actively searching for the appropriate individual for this position. It is estimated that a full-time recruiter will increase new homes to 24 annually and will be able to focus on increasing the number of new homes in the City.

Currently, there are 144 children in foster care and an average of four children enter foster care each month. There is a continuing need to recruit foster homes to assist these abused and neglected children. There is also a special need to recruit foster homes within the City of Alexandria. Currently, there are 94 approved foster homes and only 20 are located within the City limits.

Accreditation. In October 2002, the Chief of Services and two child welfare supervisors participated in training with the National Council on Accreditation for Children & Family Services, which was founded in 1977 by the Child Welfare League of America and The Family Service Association. This training consisted of quality management training and intensive accreditation training, and was the first step in educating the department on the process and requirements of accreditation. Accreditation allows an organization to focus on best practices, provides strategies for quality improvement, and demonstrates program accountability. The process could take several years and the department will seek consultation with a public child welfare consultant from the Council on Accreditation in January 2003 to assist with organizing the accreditation effort.

Child Welfare Partnership. The Child Welfare Partnership, with Linda App as chairperson, continues to play a key role in the department's child welfare reforms. In October 2002, the Partnership had a retreat to develop a strategic plan. The strategic plan includes the following goals: promote child welfare standards of excellence by identifying, reviewing, and recommending best practices; identify resources and services to meet the needs of children and their families, using federal, State and private funding sources; conduct public awareness campaigns and other community education programs to inform all segments of the community of the extent and nature of child abuse and neglect and the resources needed to protect children and strengthen families; and be a partner in establishing a child advocacy center, family prevention services, and fatherhood programs.

The Partnership has continued to develop and refine its extensive educational campaign, "Our Kids Our Business," to educate the community in identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect and to recruit foster and adoptive homes. This educational campaign includes a website, brochures in both Spanish and English, and an electronic quarterly newsletter. Community presentations are planned to begin early next year, and will include a newly developed video presentation. After an extensive recruitment process, "Video Solutions" was contracted to produce the video. The script is developed and production will begin in December 2002.

The Child Welfare Partnership, in conjunction with the department, had its second annual Adoption Saturday on November 23, 2002. Eight children and their new adoptive families took part in an adoption finalization ceremony. In addition, Child Welfare Partnership members have continued to provide support in different community activities. Target Days, held on September 7, was a collaboration between Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN), Volunteer Emergency Families for Children (VEFC), and the department. At this event, a total of 10,000 items were purchased by shoppers and donated to foster children. The Little Theatre of Alexandria fundraiser held in September was also a huge success. This event raised \$18,000 for Alexandria's foster children.

Included in the City's 2003 legislative package is the Child Welfare Partnership's recommendation to raise foster care rates. Although the State provides some funding to cover the costs incurred by foster parents, it is not enough. Currently, the foster care rate ranges from \$194 for a child four years old or younger to \$436 for a child 13 or older. This rate is far less than the \$689 that the federal government estimated in 2000 as the average monthly cost of raising a child exclusive of medical care. The Partnership believes that the State should substantially increase payments for foster parents. It has recommended that the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget study foster care rates and report their findings and recommendations for revised rates to the 2004 Session of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, the department continues its commitment to improving the City's child welfare system. Important improvements in policy and practice are in place and, with the help of the Child Welfare Partnership and all of those individuals and groups noted above who participate with the department on a regular basis, continued improvements will be made.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** There is no new fiscal impact to the City. These expenditures were originally approved by City Council on December 11, 2001, in Docket Item number 15. The annual cost of the new staff positions is \$291,143 and is funded with monies from federal reimbursement for local social services. The cost to date for outside consultants for training and technical advice for risk and safety assessment is \$86,580. The cost to date for the community education campaign is \$50,438. These funds are also derived from federal reimbursements for social services. In a separate City Council action September 24, funds were identified through federal reimbursement revenues for the foster home recruiter position. This amount is \$30,740.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment I: Implementation of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)  
Recommendations, November 2002

**STAFF:**

Beverly C. Steele, Interim Director, Department of Human Services  
Suzanne T. Chis, Director, Division of Social Services  
Pamela G. Hyde, Chief of Services, Division of Social Services

**Implementation of CWLA Recommendations  
November 2002**

**POLICY****1. Recommendation**

The agency should establish policy and practice guidelines for decision-making related to family reunification which should include the use of structured risk, safety, and family assessment tools. Time frames for the use of such tools should be established to ensure safety at every contact and to facilitate structured decision-making, highlighting key risk and safety indicators. Additionally, assessment tools would provide documentation of the basis for specific decisions. Reunification should not occur without a risk and safety assessment that incorporates the review of informal supports, formal services available, mental health condition of caregiver, special needs of children, caregiver parenting ability, and household composition. Safety must be assessed and documented at each contact.

**Status**

DHS began implementation of Alexandria's risk and safety assessment protocols in January 2002. Outside stakeholders and all child welfare services staff hired on or before October 2002 have been trained. Currently, a total of 276 risk and safety assessment protocols have been completed. This includes initial risk and safety assessments, re-assessments, and permanency planning protocols. Alexandria's risk and safety assessment process incorporates Virginia risk and safety tools utilized during child protection investigations and also incorporates a specific protocol to be used prior to reunification. The permanency planning protocol is reviewed by all key players in case collaboration meetings prior to a child's return home. Alexandria was assisted in development of this comprehensive risk and safety assessment process by Barry Salovitz, Director of Program Development, Child Welfare Institute. Mr. Salovitz continues to consult with DHS by reviewing completed protocols for consistency and thoroughness, providing training for supervisors, and establishing internal training capacity so that existing staff within DHS can train newly hired staff. Mr. Salovitz will continue to assist the department through FY 2003 with needed refinements and quality control. An extensive evaluation will be conducted by Mr. Salovitz in December, involving a thorough review of the risk and safety assessment protocol and how it is incorporated into case plans.

**2. Recommendation**

The agency should implement policies and procedures that require the review of all active cases in which the child is injured on more than one occasion. Agency policy should require that the Child Protective Service Unit assess all injuries occurring in active cases, as investigation and assessment of injuries by the ongoing caseworker risks over-

identification of the worker with the family, application of differential standards, and lack of objectivity.

Multi-disciplinary teams, composed of agency and non-agency professionals, should be convened routinely to review high-risk cases.

### **Status**

The "New Eyes" policy became effective June 25, 2001, and was revised June 25, 2002. Under the original policy, any injury to a child in any active child welfare case was to be assessed by the Child Protective Services unit. All complaints of child abuse and neglect in active cases continue to be investigated by the Child Protective Services unit.

The Child Welfare Partnership recommended that two changes be made to the "New Eyes" policy. The first is to emphasize "New Eyes" assessment of injuries sustained by foster children while in the home of a parent, where risk of abuse and neglect is greatest, by requiring parental reporting of all injuries and including this requirement in the parent's foster care service plan. The second change is to do an assessment on children in the home of a foster parent only in the case of a serious injury or when a parent, social worker, or foster parent requests a review. A "serious injury" is one which requires medical attention.

These changes, while they narrow the scope of the "New Eyes" policy, acknowledge and address the fact that the risk of abuse or neglect is greatest while the child is in the care of the natural parent, not the foster parent. It also recognizes that many checks and balances already exist as to foster parents, including the requirement to log all injuries to foster children and to complete monthly observation forms. These changes were adopted by the full Partnership on March 21, 2002, and approved by the City Council on June 25, 2002. Currently, 146 "New Eyes" assessments have been completed.

The City began the inter-jurisdictional review of high risk cases in November 2001. This joint venture with Fairfax and Arlington is scheduled quarterly and conducted in February, May, August, and November of each year. To date, a total of 40 cases have been reviewed.

### **3. Recommendation**

In addition to direct supervisory review of cases, the agency should establish written policy that requires random reviews of cases by staff other than the direct supervisor and caseworker. The results of the reviews should be shared with the supervisor and caseworker.

The agency should provide resources that will institutionalize quality improvement, quality assurance, and quality control processes within the organizational structure.

The agency should develop a mechanism for producing management reports based on the results of quality assurance activities. These reports should be used to improve practice and/or change policies.

**Status**

Written policy has been developed that requires a random review of cases as a quality control and improvement process. Random reviews are completed monthly by the Director of Social Services, Chief of Services, and supervisors not associated with the case. To date, 104 cases have been reviewed. The review results have been shared with the social workers and supervisors and any concerns have been addressed. Quality assurance is in process for the risk and safety assessment protocols. In December, an extensive review will be conducted by Barry Salovitz, Program Development Director of the Child Welfare Institute.

Additionally, the City is beginning to embark on an accreditation process that includes quality assurance, control and improvement processes. In October 2002, the Chief of Services and two supervisors attended a four day training on accreditation through the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, founded by the CWLA and the Family Service Association. In January 2003, a public child welfare coordinator with the Council on Accreditation will provide consultation to assist the department in planning the accreditation process.

**4. Recommendation**

The agency should continue individualized education plans for staff, based on assessed needs and skill levels. Additionally, the agency should track the transfer of learning through case documentation and supervisory conferences.

**Status**

Individualized staff training plans continue to be prepared based on the particular training need of each staff member. New written policy requires supervisors to monitor the transfer of learning as part of the weekly supervision process and to assess social workers' training needs. A specific training needs form has been developed and completed for each child welfare worker. These training needs forms are placed in the child welfare worker's personnel file and updated at each evaluation period. Additionally, each worker completes an evaluation form after each training course which is kept in the worker's file to document the worker's attendance and learning experience.

**5. Recommendation**

The agency should establish written policy that requires routine collateral contacts with service providers and other parties to the case.

The agency should develop related protocols with social service providers, legal counsel for the agency, parents, and children, and medical and behavioral health systems.

**Status**

The department established written policy requiring social workers to maintain routine collateral contacts with service providers and other parties to the case. Full collaboration meetings occur prior to reunification of any child in the agency's custody. Various key participants include CASA volunteers, parents, guardians ad litem, service providers and all involved attorneys.

The department also has contracts with all service vendors and began requiring monthly written reports from all providers and foster parents as of October 1, 2001. These monthly reports are discussed with service providers to determine therapeutic progress or the need for change. Also, the Departments of Human Services and Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Substance Abuse have established monthly case collaboration meetings. These collaborations are in addition to those which now occur in the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) meetings and other similar meetings. The department is in the process of developing formal monthly collaboration meetings with CASA.

**6. Recommendation**

Clearances should be obtained for every adult member in a household as a routine matter of policy and procedure. The agency should review and revise existing policy and related procedure to require that child abuse and criminal history clearances be obtained on all adults in the household, and that findings be documented and incorporated as key factors in decision making.

The policy should be specific that when an adult has resided in the current state for less than three to five years, clearances from the former state of residence should be obtained and included as a key factor in decision making.

**Status**

The City obtained State legislation which became effective July 1, 2002, requiring local social service departments throughout the State to perform criminal history and child abuse records checks in any case in which the department is considering placing a child with an adult (including returning a child to a birth parent) on an emergency, temporary, or permanent basis. Background checks are also required for all adults residing in the household where the child is to be placed. Additionally, a new state policy became effective March 2002 that gives the department access to criminal background checks through the Non-Criminal Justice Interface System (NCJI). In non-emergency situations, local workers can access NCJI through the Virginia State Police website. In emergency situations, police officers can still conduct immediate criminal record searches through Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN). If a background check is needed from a state other than Virginia, local workers must either contact the state police in that state or contact the Virginia State Police for information about arranging for National Crime Information Center (NCIC) background checks.

**PRACTICE**

**1. Recommendation**

The agency should establish written policy that requires weekly formal supervisory conferences between caseworkers and supervisors. Supervisory conferences provide support for caseworkers and an opportunity for supervisors to monitor casework

activities. Supervisor-manager conferences facilitate identification of key service program issues and agency management issues, and provide an opportunity to develop strategies for enhanced services to children and families.

**Status**

The Department established written policy requiring documentation of weekly formal supervisory conferences between social workers and supervisors. All supervisors have set up a weekly schedule with each worker for a formal supervisory conference.

**2. Recommendation**

The agency should require that the case dictation document the use of and participation in services, and the evaluation of service effectiveness.

**Status**

DHS established written policy requiring increased case record documentation regarding use of services by the client family and evaluation of these services. The case record format has been redesigned to ensure that the record reflects and addresses social workers' assessment of all services. The department continues to require monthly written progress reports from service providers and foster parents to address service utilization and effectiveness. These reports are utilized by the social workers as part of the assessment of the family's progress and the assessment of risk factors.

**3. Recommendation**

The agency should develop written instructions to staff that outline the need for documentation in the case notes that includes concrete and therapeutic services provided, and related information from service and treatment providers. Both types of services should match the assessed level of safety and risk.

**Status**

DHS established written policy to increase documentation of all services provided. The use of a structured risk and safety assessment shows the relationship between service provision and safety and risk factors, and helps workers define the type and level of services needed to address assessed risk factors. To date, 276 total risk and safety assessments have been completed to help child welfare staff define the type and level of services needed.

**4. Recommendation**

The agency should have standards of practice that require the verification of information related to a parent or caregiver's participation in services. Verification should include the frequency of participation and the quality of participation. This information should be documented in the case record dictation.

**Status**

DHS established written policy requiring verification of a parent or care giver's participation in services including the frequency and quality of participation. The department continues to require monthly reports from service providers.

**5. Recommendation**

The monitoring of caseworker contacts with foster children and foster parents should be an element in the quality assurance system and monitored by the supervisor through case record reviews.

**Status**

Current State policy requires social workers to visit with foster children and foster parents at least once per quarter in the foster home. Foster parents are required to complete a written monthly foster parent observation form. Supervisors are required to monitor compliance with this policy through a routine review of the OASIS computer documentation of contacts and through a regular review of the case record. Careful monitoring of compliance continues. A quarterly review by the Chief of Services and supervisors is done on all foster care cases to ensure that child welfare workers are in compliance with visitation policies.

**6. Recommendation**

Agency managers stated that all workers receive training on how to identify indicators of abuse and neglect. The State of Virginia mandates this training. The agency should ensure that all caseworkers, after receiving the training, are applying the learning to their documented risk and safety assessments.

In addition, the agency should develop a plan for educating all service providers and the public on the characteristics of child abuse and neglect and how to report it.

**Status**

The Department will continue to monitor social workers' application of their learning to their risk and safety assessments. This will occur by case conferences, supervisory conferences and follow up training. Training on the new structured risk and safety assessment tool has been completed and will be continued throughout the year to assure consistency and appropriate use of the tool. The consultant, Mr. Salovitz, is monitoring completed risk and safety assessments, and will be conducting an extensive risk and safety assessment evaluation in December 2002.

Training of mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect (e.g., teachers, doctors, child care providers, mental health professionals) is continuing and occurs annually. A new mandatory reporters training schedule has been developed for this new fiscal year. Training for new CASA volunteers took place in September. In October, training for new school personnel was conducted in conjunction with Domestic Violence and the "Sara" Project.

The public education subcommittee of the Child Welfare Partnership continues to work on a public education campaign. A new logo has been designed, "Our Kids, Our Business," that focuses on involving the community in identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. A website and newsletter have been launched and an educational video is in development with production scheduled to begin in December 2002.

**7. Recommendation**

The agency should provide caseworkers with clear practice guidelines on how to make clinical connections between key observations related to the casework process, and case and service goals and objectives.

Practice guidelines should include direction as to when and how to use technical assistance from clinical consultants such as psychologists and psychiatrists.

**Status**

The agency psychologist, who began January 2002, assists in establishing practice guidelines on making clinical connections. She has helped workers on complicated cases that require mental health expertise. Child welfare staff readily ask for her assistance to provide expert testimony, consultation, and evaluations on children and parents.

**PROCEDURES**

**1. Recommendation**

The agency, with the City Attorney, should develop written guidelines for determining when appeals of court decisions are needed and when other court actions should be used to assure the safety, permanency, and well being of the child.

**Status**

Written guidelines have been implemented which require that a review of all relevant information, the evidence and the law be made by the social workers, supervisors and managers and the City Attorney in determining whether an appeal is warranted.

**2. Recommendation**

The Virginia Deputy Administrator for the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) provides training on all aspects of ICPC and is available for technical assistance. DHS supervisors and managers, and the Alexandria City attorneys, who provide counsel to the agency, should participate in training and request technical assistance when appropriate.

**Status**

This training occurred in May 2001, and was attended by Assistant City Attorneys, Judges, social workers, private attorneys and various service providers. Technical

assistance is utilized when needed by seeking case conferencing with the ICPC Administrator. A second training was attended by social workers in March 2002. In October 2002, a third training was offered, and attended by child welfare staff.

City of Alexandria, Virginia

15  
12-10-02

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 17, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

FROM: BEVERLY C. STEELE, INTERIM DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES *Beverly Steele*

SUBJECT: FOSTER CARE POSITION

---

At the Tuesday, December 10, City Council meeting, questions were asked about the status of the hiring of a person who will recruit foster homes for the Department of Human Services (DHS) foster care program. Staff stated at the meeting that the Department was completing the Job Analysis Questionnaire (JAQ) for this position. We want to update you on the filling of this position.

The completed JAQ was sent to Personnel Services Department the day after the Council meeting. Personnel reviewed the JAQ immediately and informed DHS that it would proceed with advertising the position. All applicants for this position must first be qualified by the State Department of Social Services. Thus, last Thursday, the job announcement was sent to the State on December 12 to be advertised. It also was sent to the Washington Post and other publications, and posted on the City's web site. We hope to interview applicants for the position in mid- to late January and, if a solid candidate emerges from this round of interviews, to have someone in the position three to four weeks following the interviews.

Two and a half months to complete the JAQ for this position was entirely too long. Procedures are being put in place to prevent this type of delay from being repeated. Everyone in DHS who is responsible for the hiring of employees will be held accountable for the proper implementation of these procedures.

cc: Henry Howard, Director, Personnel Services