MISSION

Engaging citizens to improve outcomes for SC’s children and families affected by child abuse and neglect.

VISION

That all of South Carolina’s children and families are free from child abuse and neglect.

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COMMON CHILD WELL-BEING ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are common in child well-being policy and practices and may be used throughout this report.

CAN: Child Abuse and Neglect
CAPSS: Child and Adult Protective Services System
CAPTA: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CBPS: Community Based Prevention Services
CCFS: The Center for Child and Family Studies
CFSR: Child and Family Services Review
COSW: The College of Social Work
CPA: Child Placing Agency
CPS: Child Protective Services
CRP: Citizen Review Panel
DSS: The South Carolina Department of Social Services
ETV: Education for Foster Youth
GAL: Guardian ad Litem
GOALL: Go Out and Learn Life
IL: Independent Living Program
JRS: Job Retention Services
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
OHAN: Out of Home Abuse and Neglect
PIP: Program Improvement Plan
SCCAMRS: South Carolina Children’s Advocacy Medical Response System
SCCRP: South Carolina Citizen Review Panel
ABOUT THE PANEL

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are federally mandated mechanisms for citizen participation in child protection, through evaluation and public outreach. Each state is required to have at least one CRP. Volunteer panel members assess their state and local child protective services (CPS) agencies and collect public opinion on CPS policies and services. In South Carolina, there are three panels located in different geographic areas of the state. The Upstate Panel alternates meeting in Greenwood and Greenville counties; the Midlands Panel meets in Richland County; and the Lowcountry Panel meets in Charleston County. Panels review policies, procedures, and practices of the CPS system and make recommendations annually to the South Carolina Department of Social Services. These recommendations intend to help improve the CPS system and make a difference in the lives of children who are abused or neglected. Citizen Review Panels offer volunteers an effective way to share in the community’s responsibility to protect the children of South Carolina.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to sections 106(c)(4)(A)(i) and (ii) of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), each Citizen Review Panel is charged with evaluating the extent to which the State is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with its CAPTA State plan by: (1) examining the policies, procedures and practices of State and local child protection agencies, and (2) reviewing specific cases, where appropriate. In addition, consistent with section 106(c)(4)(A)(iii) of CAPTA, a Panel may examine other criteria that it considers important to ensure the protection of children, including the extent to which the State and local CPS system is coordinated with the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Programs of the Social Security Act. This provision also authorizes the Panels to review the child fatalities and near fatalities in the State.

In order to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community and fulfill the above requirements, citizen review panels must provide for public outreach and comment (section 106(c)(4)(C) of CAPTA). Finally, each Panel must prepare an annual report that summarizes the activities of the Panel and makes recommendations to improve the CPS system at the State and local levels, and submit it to the State and the public (section 106(c)(6) of CAPTA).

Source/Date: ACYF-CB-PI-99-09 (6/2/99); updated 3/22/06

Legal and Related References: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.) - section 106(c)
FUNCTIONS OF THE PANEL

The primary purpose of the Citizen Review Panels is to assist state and local child protection systems to be more responsive to community needs and opportunities in providing child protection services through evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy. The South Carolina Panel:

1. **Evaluates** the extent to which SC DSS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities.
2. **Conducts public outreach** and gathers public comment on current SC DSS procedures and practices involving child protection services.
3. **Advocates** for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in South Carolina.
SOUTH CAROLINA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Membership on the panel is voluntary and expected to represent the diversity of the state. The panel includes members of varying socio-economic, racial, gender, and geographical backgrounds as well as representation from diverse fields related to child well-being.

In 2017, regional panels recruited new members who completed a formalized application process and an orientation. Individuals who served on the panel in 2017 are:

**LOW COUNTRY**

1. Donna Xenakis (Chair) - Now Hear This
2. Felicia Greene - Former Human Services worker (DSS, NTF, SCYAP) in child welfare services, fostercare, and recruitment.
3. Carole Grunsky - Victim's Advocate, Berkeley County Sheriff's Office ~~~
4. Tomeika Martin - Justice Works
5. Jodi Rosenberg - Hospital Social Worker, Roper Hospital
6. Kerrie Schnake - SC Program for Infant/Toddler Care ~~~
7. Lushorn Smalls – Parent Recruiter, SAFY +++

**MIDLANDS**

1. Kimberly Janha, (Co-Chair) - Legislative Coordinator, Richland Legislative Delegation, former foster parent, kinship caregiver
2. Diana Cohen, (Co-Chair) - Lexington County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem, SC Certified Guardian ad Litem
3. Maria Dayton +++
4. Michael Dayton +++
5. Carolyn Dorrell - USC Adjunct Instructor
6. Michelle Drayton - Licensed Professional Counselor, Southeast Counseling & Consulting, LLC
7. Lillian Jones - Retired Citizen, Richland County Sheriff’s Department Mediation Program Volunteer
8. Shandreka Jones - Former Kinship Foster Care (NJ) youth
9. Rosland June - Richland County CASA Guardian ad Litem
10. Kayla Mallett – Youth Advocate, Homeless No More SC
11. Lee Patterson - Social Work Program Coordinator, Richland County Library
12. Nina Spinelli - Juvenile Arbitration Program Coordinator, 2nd Circuit
13. Kathleen Toburen - Lexington County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem
14. Chris Whitaker - Recruiter, Family Finder South Carolina Youth Advocate Program
15. Brooke Wymer - Social Worker & PhD student – University of South Carolina

**UPSTATE**

1. Brooke Thompson (Co-Chair) – Lead Staff/Adoption Specialist Bethany Christian Services
2. Angela Pruitt (Co-Chair) - Executive Director, Abbeville County First Steps, Co-Chair
3. Michael Gaskin – Executive Director, Greenville County First Steps
4. Betsy Gray-Manning - Family Finder/Recruiter, SCYAP
5. Carolyn O. Robinson - Retired Speech Pathologist
6. Derrick Quarles - First Class Consulting
7. Rosella Quarles - Retired Vocational Rehabilitation Department

+++ Indicates the panel member joined in 2017
~~~ Indicates the panel member retired in 2017

**STAFF SUPPORT**

The S.C. Department of Social Services provided funding for staff support and administrative expenses. The Center for Child and Family Studies of the College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, provided staff support for the first half of the year. In July 2017, this function was moved to the Children’s Law Center of the School of Law, University of South Carolina. Carolyn Morris, Assistant Director of the Children’s Law Center, provided interim staff support for the panel.

In March 2018, Kayla Mallett was hired as Coordinator for the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel. Kayla served on the Midlands panel for four years prior to joining the staff at The Children’s Law Center.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel would like to thank the following individuals and entities for their support of/participation in the panel’s work during 2017:

Fall Retreat Planning Committee
Diana Cohen, Carolyn Dorrell, Kim Janha, Kayla Mallett, Angela Pruitt, Derrick Quarles, Carolyn Robinson, Nina Spinelli, Brooke Thompson, Donna Xenakis

Organizations which Provided Meeting Space
Abbeville and Greenwood County First Steps, Dorchester County First Steps, Richland County Public Library,

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Speakers/Presenters
Susan Alford (DSS), Stephanie Kripa Cooper-Lewter (Sisters of Charity Foundation SC), Taron Davis (DSS), Benita Jones (DSS), Jackie Lowe (DSS), Gillia Robinson, LaToya Burns Vaugh (University of Kentucky)

INTRODUCTION

The SC Citizen Review Panel, previously housed under the Center for Child and Family Studies at the University of South Carolina, was reassigned to USC’s Children’s Law Center in July 2017. During this time, each of the three regional panels continued to meet regularly in order to advance the work already in process and to maintain member participation. Staff support was primarily provided by Carolyn Morris, Assistant Director of the Children’s Law Center.

The panels each selected areas of child well-being based on work that was underway from the previous year(s) or as a result of feedback from members of the community who were affiliated with or affected by child protective services. Members of The Lowcountry Panel continued efforts to learn more about domestic violence policies related to CPS cases and held a child abuse prevention training to engage the community. The Midlands focused primarily on public outreach as a vehicle to educate the community and receive feedback on CPS, Family engagement and foster parent licensing and retention, and kinship care. Their efforts included the launch of monthly kinship care circles. Finally, the Upstate Panel centered its work around recruiting members; case management loads; and foster home recruitment, licensing, and retention. Each panel’s recommendations are included in this report.

In addition to regularly scheduled panel meetings, members of the Executive Committee also met on a consistent basis with members of the Administration from SC DSS. Executive Chairwoman for the panel, Dr. Kimberly Janha, met with DSS Director Susan Alford regularly and other members of the panel joined Dr. Janha for regularly-scheduled meetings with Taron
Davis, Deputy State Director, Child Welfare Services Division. The Executive Committee also held meetings to discuss the panel’s work and to create consistency across the three panels.

The SCCRP supported members in doing the panel’s work by providing training and learning opportunities. Dr. Kimberly Janha, Betsy Manning, and Kayla Mallett represented the SC CRP at the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in Anchorage Alaska in May 2017. Also, the panel held its annual fall retreat which allowed members to hear from child well-being professionals and DSS administration as well as to participate in strategic planning.

The panel intends to further its work on the aforementioned issues in 2018; while also potentially exploring new areas. As the panel continues to review policy, it will also seek to implement improved ways of work in its mission to provide sound recommendations for improvement to DSS.
Dear Reader:

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), requires Citizen Review Panels (CRP) to examine the policies, procedures, and practices of the child protective services system to determine the extent to which the agency is discharging its child protection obligations. The three established panels of South Carolina, in 2017, were tasked with executing this mandate while working to stay motivated through a major reconstruction.

As members, we constantly questioned our value and/or relevance. Members still had that innate desire to serve as advocates for improved services for children and families but lacked the motivation to move forward. The lack of inspiration was depleted when we lost our dedicated coordinator, who served with such passion and competence. Left without a direct guide and understanding of the future for the CRP, the weakened vitality of the panels showed in the decline in meeting attendance and the effectiveness of meetings with the agency.

The executive committee, composed of the chairs for the three panels, formed a bond that withstood the turbulence. We stood together through the change of oversight from one agency to another. The choice to stand as a united body strengthened our efforts to regain our sense of purpose and recommit to reclaiming the value of contributions our work makes to improving services for our children and families.

With the official move of the CRP to our current coordinating agency, the Panel has regained its inspiration and is working to build our membership with persons who are as resilient and dedicated as our current members. We are committed to developing and participating in trainings that will increase our knowledge on issues we wish to address and aid us in presenting recommendations that are reasonable and relevant to the services of the Department of Social Services’ efforts of improvement.

I am grateful to my sisters in service, Diana Cohen, Midlands Co-Chair; Brooke Thompson, Upstate Chair and Donna Xenakis, Low-Country Chair for all of their selfless acts during 2017 and continuous commitment to our SC children and families. I am also appreciative to SC Department of Social Services’ State Director V. Susan Alford and Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services, Taron Davis, for their collaboration and support of the Panel’s work.

We move forward under the leadership of a dedicated child advocate, Kayla Mallett, SC CRP State Coordinator and the SC Children’s Law Center’s administrators.

Sincerely,

Kim Janha

Kim Janha, Ph.D.
Executive Chair
2017 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes a condensed version of the 2017 recommendations. For complete recommendations with their foundations, please see each panel’s report at the referenced pages.

1. The Lowcountry Panel recommends that DSS make a summary of its policies and procedures related to domestic violence cases available online. (pg. 13)
2. The Lowcountry Panel recommends that DSS work with agencies who provide services to domestic violence survivors and their families to assess the effectiveness of policies and procedures related to domestic violence cases. (pg. 13)
3. The Midlands Panel recommends that DSS create a volunteer program to help bridge the relationship between DSS and the community. (pg. 15)
4. The Midlands Panel recommends that DSS provides the panel with information as requested to assist in the ongoing review of the family engagement program, family group conferencing/ and foster parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. (pg. 15)
5. The Midlands Panel recommends that DSS continue to promote kinship care and to support kinship caregivers. (pg. 16)
6. The Midlands Panel recommends that DSS ensure kinship families are being educated about kinship care before committing by implementing an accountability practice which requires case managers to document that information was shared. (pg. 16)
7. The Midlands Panel recommends that a clear resource guide be given to “kin” caregivers once an agreement to care for the children has been made. (pg. 16)
8. The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS develop a strategic plan, to include measurable goals, for worker retention. (pg. 17)
9. The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS streamline the foster home licensing process for the agency as well as child placing agencies. (pg. 18)
10. The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS review best practices from other states as it relates to foster care licensing, support, and retention. (pg. 18)

The foundations for each of the recommendations presented are included in the proceeding reports from the Lowcountry Panel, the Midlands Panel, and the Upstate Panel. In 2017, the chairperson/persons of each panel assumed the responsibility of drafting and submitting information detailing the efforts, findings, and recommendations of that panel for the year.
LOW COUNTRY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Submitted by:
Donna Xenakis, Lowcountry CRP Chair

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Lowcountry Recommendation 1: The Lowcountry Panel recommends that SCDSS make a summary of its policies and procedures which relate to domestic violence cases available, easily accessible, and comprehensible online for public consumption. Moreover, the panel recommends that DSS specify how the agency educates and trains case workers to handle cases involving domestic violence survivors.

Lowcountry Recommendation 2: The Lowcountry Panel recommends that SCDSS creates policies and practices that do not re-victimize domestic violence survivors and that the agency work with organizations serving families who survive domestic violence to assess the success of its policies in maintaining the dignity and supporting the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of surviving families specifically.

The Lowcountry Citizen Review Panel initiated inquiry into the effects of domestic violence on children in South Carolina in 2016. The panel specifically sought to better understand the policies and procedure related to the handling of domestic violence cases once a law enforcement report is received by the agency. To support these efforts, the panel also researched agencies and organizations within the state which serve domestic violence survivors.

The panel requested information from SCDSS to review policies and procedures used when children are involved in a domestic violence case, and considered researching the policies and standard operating procedures that states such as Minnesota, Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and New Jersey follow. Although the efforts to compile the information from other states and from domestic violence-related organizations is still underway, the panel feels strongly that the issue warrants review, and recognizes that adverse childhood experiences like domestic violence can create undesirable outcomes in a child’s life into adulthood and potentially lasting a lifetime. Accordingly, the panel will continue this project, and will use information and research attained in 2016, 2017, and throughout the remainder of 2018 to make further recommendations in the 2018 report.

CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS & PREVENTION TRAINING

Members of the Lowcountry Citizen Review Panel remain concerned about child abuse and neglect and child fatalities in South Carolina. The panel offered a free Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training in 2017 in a proactive attempt to engage the public through education about child abuse and neglect and to generate awareness about the SCCRPs purpose and work.
The panel’s efforts support the belief that educating adults will help keep children safe and aid in prevention efforts. The panel will continue to engage the public through education and awareness in 2018.

The South Carolina Citizen Review Panel sponsored a FREE comprehensive Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training April 24, 2017 at The Colleton Center in Colleton County. The Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training is registered with SCDSS Child Care Training System for 2.0 Professional Development contact hours. This training is provided by Donna Xenakis, Chair of the Lowcountry CRP and CEO of Now Hear This.

Children cannot be expected to protect themselves from child abuse. It is the responsibility of adults to be trained in child abuse awareness and prevention. Children are safer when adults are educated in the signs of child abuse and neglect, and how to react to them. In this comprehensive training, participants learned: the four types of child abuse, why child abuse occurs, who gets abused, and who the alleged perpetrators are, the impact of child abuse on the child, their family; and on society, what SC Law states about Child Abuse, what SC Law states about spanking children, the clues that children give us when they are being abused, the probable actions of the alleged perpetrator, according to SC Law, who “Mandatory Reporters” are, and their responsibilities about reporting, what to do if you suspect a child is being abused, how to handle a disclosure of child abuse, and what to document, what a “Minimal Facts Interview” is, why it is so important, and how to conduct one, what “Reason to Believe” is, when SC Law requires a report to be made and which agency to contact to make a report.

Of the 14 adults who attended 13 rated the training as “excellent”, and 1 as “very good” Participants included adults from the community: parents, grandparents, foster parents, and the Colleton County Sheriff’s Office.

Feedback received includes:

“Ms Donna has given me exactly what I needed tonight. I’m so blessed to have heard this.”

- Robin Neal, parent

“I really appreciate and enjoyed the training, it is so important to know the right way to protect our children.”

- Erica E. Bright-Edwards, parent

“Great class, I learned a lot!”
- Matt Avant, Toe 2 Toe MMA & Fitness

“Very Informative!

~ Lisa Sent, parent

As the Charleston panel continues education and awareness efforts, it will work to re-engage current members and to recruit new members so that the panel’s work may continue to be guided by diverse perspectives from a variety of disciplines.
PUBLIC AWARENESS

Midlands Recommendation 1: As recommended in previous reports, the Midlands Panel recommends that DSS develops a volunteer program, which can aid in educating the public and improving and maintaining a positive image for the agency in the community. Additionally, a volunteer program could potentially engage the public in efforts to assist youth involved in the child welfare system. Extending the agency into the community is an opportunity to gain the perspective from stakeholders that are not directly affiliated with DSS.

Foundation for Recommendation: Public awareness aids the panel’s work by creating opportunities to educate the public as well as engage the public in order to receive citizen input on the policy and practice of SC DSS. The Midlands Panel’s efforts to engage the public through social media and events led to recurring feedback from members of the community related to a lack of information related to services provided by DSS and the agency’s role in child well-being for the State of South Carolina.

One way the Midlands Panel engaged the community to increase awareness of child well-being issues and to acquire feedback from citizens was through its online presence. Kayla Mallet, Public Outreach Manager, kept the public aware of the panel’s work, child welfare events, and publications related to child well-being by sharing information via the state panel’s Facebook page. By increasing its online presence, the panel connected with more citizens, which creates greater opportunity for feedback from the public and education about the panel’s purpose and work.

During Child Abuse Prevention Month (April), the Midlands Panel partnered with the Richland Library to host a Kinship Care Summit and Volunteer Fair. Kinship Care champions, Dr. Stephanie Cooper-Lewter, Sisters of Charity Foundation; Taron Davis, Deputy Director, SC Department of Social Services; and, Benita Jones, Region Three Kinship Care Coordinator, SC Department of Social Services served as panelists for a talk about Kinship Care. The Kinship Care panel discussion allowed for attendees to ask questions and be informed of the benefits and challenges of being a kinship caregiver. Additionally, attendees were presented information on the programs and progress of state and local agencies in their efforts to serve kinship care families. The discussion facilitated during the event prompted the panel to launch a kinship circle initiative to hear the experiences of kinship caregivers while offering communal support.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM/FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING/FOSTER LICENSING-RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Midlands Recommendation 2: The Midlands Panel sub-committee will continue to review family engagement; family group conferencing; and foster care licensing, recruitment, and retention in 2018. The panel recommends that DSS assist this effort by providing any information requested to aid in the continued review.
Foundation for Recommendation: The Midlands Panel began examining Family Engagement and Family Group Conferencing in 2016. In 2017, the sub-committee, chaired by Diana Cohen, Midlands Co-Chair, decided that additional research was needed to better understand the scope of the program. Panel members desired a more substantial understanding of the policies and practices related to family engagement and family group conferencing in order to better engage DSS Administration on the topic.

Foster parenting recruitment and retention remain ongoing challenges for DSS. Members of the Midlands Panel who are also affiliated with Richland County and Lexington County foster parent associations, posed concerns with recruitment and retention because of feedback from foster parents and other individuals affiliated with the foster care system. This subcommittee, chaired by Maria Dayton, collaborated to determine areas of foster care to give their attention. As a result of strategic planning, the committee resolved to focus on: 1) understanding the foster parent recruitment and training process as well as the support policies and procedures and 2) emphasizing effective communication with current foster parents. In order to achieve these goals, the panel researched online, conducted informal interviews with foster parents, and hosted Foster-Licensing Director, Jackie Lowe, who shared more about the process and the work DSS is doing around foster-licensing.

KINSHIP CARE

Midlands Recommendation 3: The Midlands Panel recommends that DSS continues its efforts in promoting kinship care and supporting caregivers. It is recommended that all current Caseworkers are trained or retrained on the DSS Kinship Care Program by December of 2018. Caseworkers should each be provided a copy of the Kinship Care Program Toolkit to reference when working with kinship families.

Midlands Recommendation 4: An accountability function should be implemented, immediately, to ensure that family members who agree to take responsibility for their kin are fully informed of DSS’s kinship care services and resources. Caseworkers should utilize established documentation methods to properly note that caregivers have been given comprehensive information to make an informed decision.

Midlands Recommendation 5: The Midlands Panel recommends that a clear resource guide be given to “kin” caregivers once an agreement to care for the children has been made.

Foundation for Recommendations: Consistent with trends over previous years, the conversation around kinship care continued to grow in 2017. Prompted by feedback from the Kinship Care summit held in March, the Kinship Care subcommittee partnered with members of the local community and child well-being related agencies to create kinship care circles and provide a space for kinship care givers to share their experiences, receive information related to kinship care resources and support, and to build community with others involved in kinship care. In partnership with the Richland Library, members Dr. Kim Janha, Kayla Mallett, Lee Patterson, and Brooke Wymer convened kinship caregivers at the main branch of the library on Assembly Street. The circles began in August and were held on the last Tuesday of each month thereafter. Participants shared the challenges and the positive experiences involved with kinship care and in engaging DSS.

In October, kinship circle participants attended the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children’s public hearing at the State House. The committee submitted written information
concerning resources for kinship care families. In addition to the JLCC’s meeting in October, Ms. Gillia Robinson (a kinship circle participant) and Dr. Kim Janha shared their story at the annual Kinship Care Summit. Participation in the event raised awareness about kinship care and provided an opportunity to share about the CRP’s purpose and work with attendees.

Dr. Janha continues to represent the CRP as a member of the Sister of Charity Foundation’s Kinship Care Advisory Council. This collaborative group, comprised of child welfare advocates, maintains their stance as resounding voices for increased awareness and as supporters of increased resources to those who serve as kinship caregivers. The work of this council produced a Kinship Care resource guide that was distributed to attendees at the Kinship Care Summits.

The Kinship Care subcommittee members dedicated their time and efforts to connect with community partners to build a stronger support system for the varied kinship care family dynamics. Future steps include aggressive outreach to schools and religious organizations for assistance in identifying and making kinship families aware of this initiative.

Kinship circles resulted in panel members hearing directly from individuals who provide kinship care. Caregivers consistently identified several areas in which additional support is desired. Resources were mentioned most frequently as an area where caregivers faced challenges! Kinship caregivers expressed the need to be properly and thoroughly educated on available economic support and other resources. Several participants expressed concern that case managers did not seem to be well-trained on kinship care, especially kinship care licensing.

UPSTATE CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Submitted by:
Angela Pruitt, Upstate CRP Co-chair
Brooke Thompson, Upstate CRP Co-chair

MEMBERSHIP & STAFFING

In 2017, the Upstate Citizen Review Panel focused efforts on building panel membership. Several former members returned to the panel and have added a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and ingenuity. A major focus of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel as a whole had been transitioning and maintaining stability during the months following the previous coordinator’s resignation. The Upstate Panel engaged in discussion regarding concerns over the CRP budget, requesting to “house” the CRP under a different entity, and providing input on the hiring of a new coordinator.

CASE MANAGER RETENTION AND CASE LOAD

Upstate Recommendation 1: The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS develop a strategic plan, to include measurable goals, for worker retention. The Upstate Panel also recommends that this plan include training of supervisors and/or program coordinators to provide grief and debriefing support to workers who express a desire for these services. Caseworkers should feel
free to express their grief or secondary trauma to their supervisor or program coordinator and know that they will be met with understanding and expertise.

The panel continued to engage with representatives from the Department of Social Services regarding their employee retention efforts and their caseload study. Our panel members have long believed that employee satisfaction, and thereby the retention rate, has a direct impact on quality of services provided and case outcomes. The panel’s goal is the same as the Department of Social Services – to ensure that the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families in South Carolina are strengthened.

Upstate recommendations over several years have included ensuring trauma informed services for staff that are exposed to or experiencing trauma. This closely ties in with worker retention and satisfaction. The panel’s engagement with former caseworkers, has led to findings that in addition to having high caseloads, many did not feel they were supported by their supervisor or had an avenue through which to process the secondary trauma associated with their responsibilities. It is the panel’s position that caseworkers are exposed to unspeakable traumas on a daily basis and will not thrive in their jobs unless they feel supported and equipped. This has a direct impact on the quality of services provided to clients.

**FOSTER HOME RECRUITMENT, LICENSING, AND RETENTION PROCESS**

**Upstate Recommendation 2:** The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS streamline the foster home licensing process for the agency as well as CPAs. The process and paperwork required by SCDSS from CPAs should mirror what is required for SCDSS licensed homes.

**Upstate Recommendation 3:** The Upstate Panel recommends that SCDSS review best practices from other states to improve foster home retention rates and implement meaningful change in the way that foster parents are supported by licensing workers, placement workers, and caseworkers.

**Foundation for Recommendations:** The Upstate Panel continues to be interested in reviewing the foster home recruitment, licensing, and retention process. The panel is engaged in inquiry to better understand what barriers prevent or hinder these processes, eliminating redundancy in the licensing process, and ensuring that licensing requirements are consistent from agency to agency. The panel is aware that licensing and recruitment are at times dependent on other systems, such as the State Fire Marshal, and that can impact services. The panel holds the position that simplifying the licensing process, while maintaining safety standards, will enable more quality homes to become licensed and provide more stable, loving environments for children who are in the foster care system. Additionally, providing adequate, expert support to current foster families will ensure a healthy retention rate. The panel would like to learn more about efforts the Department of Social Services is making to retain foster parents. Several members of the panel are personally involved as foster parents and licensing workers through Child Placing Agencies and have seen these concerns first hand.
The National CRP Annual Conference was held in Anchorage, Alaska in 2017. Kim Janha and Betsy Manning were selected to represent the SCCRP at the conference. Kayla Mallett also attended and represented the panel.

According to registration information published on Eventbrite.com:

The 2017 National CRP Conference [provided] an opportunity to explore various challenges and opportunities to find common ground and foster constructive CRP-CPS relationships. The conference theme, Common Goals, Many Paths, is a recognition that shared goals may not always mean shared understanding of those goals, and that collaborative relationship and constructive dialogue helps in finding common ground.

Following her conference attendance, Betsy Manning shared the following reflections and notes:

6th National Citizen Review Panel Conference
May 10-12. 2017/ Anchorage Alaska

May 19, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to learn more and participate in such an impactful conference. The conference was very informative and collectively a great introduction to the work CRP is tasked to complete. During the conference local information was shared as well as the culture and words from native Alaskans about their experiences in the child welfare system. While all aspects of the conference outlined in the detailed schedule were learning opportunities the sessions below stood out the most in my experience.

I attended the following sessions and included what I received by way of information/direction by doing so.

May 10, 2017

- Reception and Breakfast which included welcomes from many local and National affiliated CRP members and/or supporters.
- Luncheon and panel discussions- Why do we need CRP? Perspectives from the Government.
  - My appreciation for partnership in this type of work was cultivated and confirmed via this presentation. CRP can partner with CPS to improve the overall image of child welfare organizations. As a member of the CRP, hearing that nationally the idea of promoting positive change in the child welfare system is a consistent theme gives our work more feet and a louder voice.
- Breakout Sessions- The power of community awareness: Events and ideas to engage others in CRP work. Maria Turner and Lisa Hunt
  This session was important to me and the panel I serve due to the low membership currently. Making the connection was what stood out to me in this session. Discussing CRP with community members that are connected to the cause is the logical way to increase membership. Learning how to draw that out of people was the most important information shared. Having an elevator speech and being prepared to discuss your CRP and items being worked on is most important. In order for the community to join
they want to hear about the successes of the panel and how they can be a part of the next success. Staying away from areas you do not know about as well as speaking using acronyms and abbreviations that people may not be aware of could change someone’s mind of joining. Ways to improve your chances of engaging someone would be thinking of what you would like to say and not reciting just the mission statement. Showing people your passion and speaking with confidence about the work the panel is doing. This is a sure way to support others in joining. Also, having social media, written materials as well as tag lines are needed aspects of engaging others.

May 11, 2017

- Reception and Breakfast which included greetings and introduction by Alaska CRP and the Key Note speaker- Debra Schilling Wolfe
  - The impact of joining with families as a case worker to improve relationship-building practices. This will increase the willingness of families to comply with what the child protection agency is asking in terms of treatment in order to return children to their home. The most impactful information I got from this session was “leave your power at the door.” Do the work and partner with families. Engage in relationship building from first contact. This relates to CRP in the as panel members and/or coordinator we should position ourselves for success by following these themes:
    - Identify shared goals
    - Don’t go in holding all of the power
    - Establish priorities for action
    - Offer support for change and reform
    - Have an agreed mission
    - Determine who should be at the table
    - Collect and utilize data
  - Roadblock and challenges
    - Mission Drift
      - Collaborative vs. Individual goals
      - Politics
      - Establishing Trust
      - Multi-sector challenges (understanding the language)
      - Working as a team
  - Breakout Session- Member perceptions of CRP efficacy- Does Structure Matter?
    - Plenary: Who reaches out first? Important constituencies for a CRP. Facilitated by Kathleen McCoy

Moving forward I am reminded that structure is important on the CRP, having a combined goal and shared thinking is a must. As we move forward, I know that several voices working as a cohesive team will be more successful at making changes to the child welfare system. One very loud voice is not heard and does not have the impact of many.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manning, Recruiter/Family Finder
South Carolina Youth Advocate Program
Upstate-CRP Panel
The SCCRP held its annual retreat on October 19, 2017, in Columbia. Fifteen members participated, representing all three panels. Additionally, leadership of the SCDSS and the Children’s Law Center were present. The Panel presented its Person of the Year award to Cheryl Wilson Worrell for her devoted service to the Panel from 2008 – 2017.

The panel chairpersons welcomed the participants and summarized the current CRP focus areas. The keynote speaker was LaToya Burns Vaughn, Program Coordinator at the University of Kentucky for the Citizens Review Panel and the Children’s Justice Act Task Force. She received her Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Louisville and a Master of Science in Family Studies with a concentration in marriage and family therapy from the University of Kentucky. Ms. Vaughn presented an overview of the purpose, responsibilities, and roles of Citizen Review Panels. She discussed the importance of citizen participation in public child welfare and reviewed the requirements for citizen review panels, including diverse membership, regular meetings, maintenance of confidentiality, and preparation of an annual report with recommendations. She elaborated on ways that a panel can fulfill its responsibility to review the child protective system. For example, panels can analyze data, conduct an in-depth review of a small number of cases, review policies and procedures, conduct surveys, or hold community forums or focus groups. In closing, Ms. Vaughn emphasized the need for panel members to remain committed, to be willing to compromise and listen, to work on manageable and specific tasks, and to keep their eye on the big picture of safety, well-being, and permanency for all children.

DSS Director Susan Alford and Deputy Director Taron Davis provided updates on the agency’s efforts to improve child welfare services. Ms. Alford discussed the ways that DSS receives input and emphasized the value of external input from the panels and other groups. Ms. Davis reviewed the final settlement agreement in the Michelle H. class action law suit, which was brought on behalf of children in foster care. She noted that DSS entered into the agreement to avoid prolonged litigation, and that the agreement is in line with DSS’ casework practice model being developed. The settlement agreement went into effect on October 4, 2016, and is being implemented under the oversight of federal court monitors. The agreement addresses caseload size, worker-child visitation, out-of-home abuse and neglect (OHAN) investigations, foster care placements, and healthcare. DSS is required to conduct a placement needs assessment to determine the minimally adequate capacity and array of placements for meeting the needs of children in foster care. The agreement imposes restrictions on temporary placements and use of congregate care for young children. Joint placement of siblings, family visitation, and therapeutic foster care placements are also addressed. A health care coordination plan must be developed to ensure initial and periodic screens, assessments, and treatment for children in foster care. Monitoring reports will be filed with the court every six months and will be made public.

Michelle Dhunjishah, Director of the Children’s Law Center, presented a brief overview of the Center’s mission and functions. She discussed various ways that the Center can support the work of the Panel, including staff expertise, data analysis, connections to other groups, and access to training.
In the closing session, Kayla Mallett engaged panel members in discussion of membership recruitment and priorities for the coming year. Feedback from the attendees indicated that the retreat was beneficial, and several suggested that methods for increasing interaction among the three panels be explored.

THE YEAR AHEAD

The panel’s work in 2018 will continue inquiry into the issues addressed in 2017 while also potentially adding additional areas for review. As the panel continues to transition into new staff support, grow in membership, and create more structure, leadership and members will work toward the following goals:

IMPLEMENTING AN ANNUAL TIMELINE

In an effort to cultivate more consistency across the three regional panels, and to help ensure systematic and intentional ways of work, the SCCRPs executive team, in coordination with staff from the Children’s Law Center, will implement an annual timeline to guide the panel’s work. The timeline will help panels plan the year ahead as well as create a pace for the work from selecting a topic and engaging in inquiry to making recommendations to DSS.

RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

Each of the regional panels will assess its current membership to gauge the diversity of representation, especially professional disciplines. After reviewing the current membership, panels will recruit, onboard, and train new members.

REVIEWING AND UPDATING SCCRP BY-LAWS

The Executive Committee will form a sub-committee consisting of chairs and members who will review the current SCCRPs by-laws and suggest edits that will help ensure the panel’s work is both effective and efficient.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF CHILDREN’S LAW CENTER RESOURCES

The Children’s Law Center has an abundance of resources and trainings available that may prove helpful to the panels as they work to generate findings and make recommendations on selected issues. When appropriate, panel members will be given the opportunity to register for trainings conducted by the Children’s Law Center and will have the opportunity to work with the Children’s Law Center to potentially bring relevant trainings to the panel.
IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION

In order to make sound recommendations to DSS, the panel will create methods of
documenting and tracking data acquired formally or informally that lends itself to the review of a
policy’s effectiveness. Data improvement includes increasing the amount of qualitative and
quantitative data obtained; as well as, implementing standardized means of reporting and
recording the data.
THANK YOU.