

# **NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

## **Technical Assistance Report**



Prepared for Oklahoma Department of Human Services  
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Report date: June 24, 2009

Please indicate which responses were employed in this T/TA:

- Technical Assistance
- Training
- Phone Consultation
- Referral to another NRC
- Referral to Other Organization
- Review of Policy and Materials
- Publications Provided
- Secondary Research
- Other

### **Situation and Technical Assistance Request**

Oklahoma has requested assistance in reviewing their current policy and practice regarding safety in out of home care. Some recent incidents of children being harmed in out of home care have brought this issue to the forefront and the agency is committed to making improvements. This will also be an issue in their PIP, which is currently in negotiations.

### **Site Visit**

During an earlier visit with agency leadership there was consensus that safety in out of home care involves CPS staff, Permanency workers and Foster Care staff, since each plays a role depending on the specific circumstances. It was decided to begin this effort with a meeting with representatives of the foster care staff and adoption staff.

In Oklahoma, the foster care staff is responsible for licensing/relicensing resource families and for staying in contact through the course of the time the family is involved in the foster/kinship program. In some areas of the state the agency staff actually does the family assessment and training while in other counties that work is done by contractors. When the assessment and training are completed by a contractor the state agency ultimately approves the family for use as a resource, but may not have any direct contact with the family during that process. Adoption workers license adoptive families. When the child is placed for adoption, the worker becomes responsible for the child as well as support for the family.

At this first meeting we explored the many functions of the foster care staff and issues that might lead to concerns regarding the ability to identify safety concerns and assess protective capacities. The group agreed that

**foster care staff have a unique role in assuring safety since their work is primarily with the resource family rather than the child in care.**

**Work load concerns were identified along with workers' skills in assessing protective capacities, proper training and preparation for resource families and the agency's ability to provide adequate support to families. The group also identified areas where the responsibilities of the different staff overlap and sometimes become confused. Work group members expressed concern that the need for a placement for a child often took priority over making sure that the placement was a good fit for both the child and the family.**

**The issues seemed a little different for the adoption workers since they become responsible for all services to the child after placement. While the Adoption worker is involved in the placement decision, this is really the purview of the Permanency worker. The child changes workers at the time of adoption.**

**In both adoption and foster care, reports of abuse and neglect are investigated by CPS staff. There is good policy around the communication between the CPS staff and other staff involved with the family but little attention has been given to the practice skills needed to insure safety while involving the resource family, the birth family and the child, where appropriate, in assessment and safety planning. The work group would like to see some work in this area.**

**It was also noted that there is a need for clarification on policy regarding the appropriateness of using safety plans for a foster, adoptive or kinship placement. Some in the group felt this was never an option while others felt more open to other possibilities.**

### **Next Steps**

**This work group primarily focused on the role of foster care staff and adoption staff. Plans will be made to engage tribal staff and workers and supervisors from CPS, Permanency Planning and contractors.**

**For each section the plan will be to review policy, training and support. These efforts will start with foster care to be completed by the end of September 2009.**