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newsletter of the citizen review board

A mission to end child abuse and neglect fatalities in US

Every day, four to eight children in the United States die from abuse or neglect at the hands of their parents or caretakers. How can we stop this?

That's the question the [Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities \(CECANF\)](#) poses, and attempts to answer, in a recently-published study on abuse that offers potential national strategies to end child maltreatment fatalities.

The 168-page report, titled [Within Our Reach](#), follows two years of examination of child welfare systems by the federally-created commission, as well as interviews with government leaders, researchers, and public and private organizations who serve children and families.

The study states that there are few evidence-based programs to prevent child maltreatment deaths across the nation, and no state with a sufficiently comprehensive plan to eliminate the problem outright.

"But we found examples of promising practices," the report says. Local efforts throughout the country are cited,

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CRB Field Manager

Photo: Members from
BACA Bear Creek Chapter
Medford/Rogue Valley

Biker organization provides aid and support to abused children in Oregon, nation and beyond

You may have seen them roaring down the highway: tough men and women, clad in leather vests and heavy boots, astride big, noisy choppers. Some might find them intimidating. There's a group of bikers out there, however, who are akin to superheroes for abused children: To them, they're friends and family, available for help day or night.

Bikers Against Child Abuse (BACA) is

an international, nonprofit-volunteer organization with membership in nine countries and 48 states. The mission of the BACA – which has five chapters in Oregon – is to create a safer environment for abused children. The group strives to empower children to not feel afraid of the world in which they live. Members work in conjunction with local and state officials, who are already in place, to protect children.

See "Bikers," p. 4

Citizen review panels seek better foster parent recruitment, support

The Citizen Review Board (CRB) is excited to provide an update on the work its three citizen review panels in Douglas, Lane and Multnomah counties have completed for 2015-2016.

What are Citizen Review Panels?

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires states to create at least three citizen review panels to evaluate the extent to which state and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their child-protection responsibilities. The role of the panels is to identify issues to explore, to review DHS policies, collect data and information, and make recommendations for system improvements. In September 2012, the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Oregon transferred responsibility for ensuring compliance with this requirement to the CRB.

Panel members include CRB members and staff; judges; DHS staff; attorneys; court appointed special advocates and staff; foster parents; and other community stakeholders involved in the child welfare system.



Lisa Romano *
Former CRB
Field Manager

During the past three years, areas of focus for panels have included reducing the number of children with a permanency plan of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA); determining whether laws, policies, and procedures relating to relative placement have a disproportionate impact on communities of color; increasing safety and permanent connections for older youth in foster care; financial disincentives to permanency and workload of child welfare workers; and community engagement in the foster care system.

Throughout the course of a fiscal year, panels meet regularly, and then host a community forum to discuss their findings and recommendations for improvement. Panels also write an annual report containing a summary of their activities and recommendations. DHS has up to six months after the date the report is submitted to prepare a written response describing whether — and how — it will incorporate the recommendations.

Visitation Policies: A Local Topic Goes Statewide

Panels have the responsibility of making recommendations, not implementing the recommendations or establishing policies or programs themselves. However, CRB is uniquely poised to follow up and work together with DHS to implement panel recommendations.

A good example of ongoing work on a panel topic involves visits between children and parents. Frequent and quality visits preserve attachments, and are one of the best predictors of successful and lasting reunification. In 2013-2014, the Lane County panel conducted a comprehensive policy review and a survey of local visitation practices. It found that DHS visitation policy was sound, yet its implementation was uneven. The panel requested that the CRB explore the effectiveness of visitation policy implementation statewide, and DHS agreed to partner with CRB on this initiative.

Between November 1, 2014 and April 30, 2015, boards completed visitation surveys for every child reviewed with a plan of reunification. Data was collected from 33 counties on 1,316 children. Board members felt that in nine out of 10 cases reviewed, DHS was making concerted efforts to ensure that the frequency and quality of visitation was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship between children and their families. However, in approximately one in four cases, visitation plans were not reviewed with a parent within the past 90 days as required by DHS policy. Also, in about one in four cases, board members believed the circumstances of the case supported revision of the current visit and contact plan. Based on the results, CRB submitted three additional recommendations to DHS about ways to improve visits.

Moving Forward: Panel Collaboration

The three panels met for a planning session last summer. Each panel independently decided to examine how to better recruit, support and/or retain foster parents. Panels felt strongly that this topic demands their attention due to the following problems:

- Insufficient number of foster homes.
- Children have multiple placements.
- Overcrowding in foster homes.
- Lack of diversity in foster placements.
- Too few opportunities to best match children and foster parents.
- Lack of and/or miscommunication between DHS and foster parents.
- Relative foster parents do not consider themselves to be foster parents, and, therefore, tend not to access

See "Review panel," p. 5

Work with victims of traumatic events can take emotional, physical toll

Child welfare caseworkers, child advocates, CRB volunteers, judges, attorneys, and service providers are all in a position to make a difference for children and families. We enter this work because we care, have empathy for those in need, and want to make a difference. As professionals who work with or review records of children and families who have experienced trauma, there is a risk for secondary trauma.

Secondary trauma is also referred to as compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma – the cumulative effect on the helper of working with survivors of traumatic life events. “The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet,” says Rachel Remen, author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom*. Anyone working with maltreated or traumatized children needs to set aside time to rest, emotionally and physically.

Empathy, or identifying with another’s situation, is important when working with children and families. Unfortunately, when we “over-identify” with clients, our risk for internalizing their trauma increases.



Sandy Berger
CRB
Field Manager

So how do you know if you are experiencing secondary trauma? When you begin to see or feel – in yourself – emotional or physical indicators of distress, it is time to step back and evaluate yourself.

See the table above for indicators of secondary trauma.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance and developing a plan for increased personal wellness will help prevent secondary trauma. Click [HERE](#) to view a 4-minute video from the 2014 Making Connections conference in Eugene, Ore. The video highlights some of the ways attendees take care of their mental wellbeing.

Other ways to prevent secondary trauma:

Humor - Smiling releases endorphins, natural pain killers and serotonin. Together, these three make us feel good. Smiling also lowers our blood pressure.

Regular Exercise - Exercise increases endorphins and

Indicators of Secondary Trauma		
<u>Emotional Indicators</u>	<u>Physical Indicators</u>	<u>Personal Indicators</u>
Anger	Headaches	Self-isolation
Sadness	Stomach aches	Cynicism
Prolonged Grief	Back aches	Mood swings
Anxiety	Exhaustion	Irritability

decreases stress hormones like cortisol. Yoga, swimming and walking are all good options to help you reduce stress.

Healthy Diet - What we eat plays an important role in how we feel. Deficiencies in some vitamins, minerals and nutrients can lead to symptoms associated with stress.

Meditation - Meditation increases blood flow, slows the heart rate, and leads to a deeper level of relaxation.

Breathing Exercises - Breathing exercises promotes deep relaxation, improved sleep, and the ability to respond to stress better.

Enough Sleep - Sufficient sleep is increasingly being recognized as an essential aspect of health promotion. Adults need 8 hours.

Spending Time with Family and Friends - Our brains are wired for relationships. Social connections are probably the most important factor for our happiness.

Nature - Time spent in nature may be one of the most natural ways to reduce stress. Studies show people who spend time in “green spaces” have lower levels of cortisol.

Taking Vacations - Vacations promote overall wellbeing and creativity. Many benefits include quality of sleep and mood, with benefits still present five weeks later.

Social Interactions - It is important for co-workers to set aside time for social interactions like celebrating birthdays and luncheons to promote mutual support.

Training - Ongoing professional development and training is important in helping workers cope with difficult work.

Set Limits - You don’t have to catch every ball that’s thrown to you. Know what your limits are.

Take Breaks - Taking breaks is very important for your physical and mental wellbeing. Short breaks can help increase your concentration and work productivity.

See “Secondary trauma,” p. 5

Bikers: “We’re like a rock of emotional strength for children.”

BACA sponsors them within an established, united organization by providing group physical and emotional support by affiliation, and physical presence during crisis. BACA’s motto is “no child deserves to live in fear.”

I became acquainted with this incredible organization when BACA sponsored a sibling group involved in one of the worst abuse cases perhaps ever reviewed by the Citizen Review Board. The children all suffered severe neglect and abuse, including isolation, social and educational deprivation, sexual and physical abuse, verbal abuse and emotional torture. Although this case was horrific, there were bright spots for celebration.

Aside from the children’s incredible resiliency, stellar efforts on behalf of DHS, and a superb job by the board, the most uplifting part of the case for everyone involved was the children’s sponsorship by BACA. Great efforts were made to prevent the children from having to testify at grand jury. They will be required to testify at the criminal trial; however, they will not be alone. BACA will accompany them to court via motorcycle convoy and be present at the hearing.

I had opportunity to meet the members of a local chapter of BACA, including the children’s primary — aka, “Coach.” The intake worker from DHS who set up the connection is also a former BACA member. The motorcycle “gang” met the children at their foster home to perform what’s referred to as a “Level 1 introduction.” At this event, the children are officially welcomed and adopted into the BACA family. They are given vests with their BACA name (which they are free to wear or not), and a BACA blanket and/or BACA pillowcase, embroidered with the name of everyone who participated in the adoption. In some groups the children are given a teddy bear that has been filled up with love by every member hugging it (refills on request). The child is assured that no one is allowed to hurt, or intimidate a member of their family ever again. The child and the BACA members all use “nicknames or handles” so that an abuser can never trace the child by investigating or identifying the BACA member.

The child is assigned two members geographically closest to be their primary contacts. All bikers have completed extensive background checks, been long-term members of the organization, and trained by a licensed mental-health professional to provide intervention. They take the children for rides, provide funding for therapy if there is a delay in the case that denies the child needed support, have parties

and barbecues, and, if requested by the child, accompany the child to court. They will even camp in the front yard if a child calls and needs reassurance. They will see a child to the school bus and be waiting when they get home, or play “Barbies” if that is what the child needs. They stress this is what adoption into the BACA family means. Chapters work with each other to provide an impressive presence, when needed.

BACA members are quick to point out that they are not vigilantes. They avoid confrontation, but they will stand between the child and the abuser, if necessary. If the abuser

tries to have contact, BACA will create a presence at the home of the child, being visible at times when the family might be the most vulnerable. They also attend court with their “wounded friends.” It is scary for an adult to go to court: For a child facing an abuser and all their family, it is terrifying. In the company of BACA members, they can say “my friends are scarier than yours.” One BACA member pointed out that many of these children do not have many adults they can trust and rely on, but their BACA friends are adults the children can trust.

“Chops,” president of the Seven Bridges Chapter in Jacksonville, Fla. says “We give the kids the empowerment to say: ‘This is who did this to me.’ We are not speakers for the children and we’re not counselors. We’re more like rocks of emotional strength for them. And we let them know that while we’re around, nobody’s going to mess with them.”

Much more about the organization can be found online at oregon.bacworld.org, including an inspirational video by the founder, John Paul Lilly, aka “Chief”, a licensed clinical social worker and a registered play therapist/supervisor. YouTube also has several videos about the group. Longitudinal studies conducted to measure the impact on the level of fear children who’ve been involved with the BACA organization experience indicate that the youth with BACA support experience decreased distress during time of involvement. Other findings include a child’s overall stress; emotional and behavioral problems decreased over time from the baseline (before the child met with BACA); and that a child is four times more likely to testify if BACA has been involved.

I urge you to learn more about this fantastic organization. They are such a source of empowerment for children. If only I could strap on my helmet and ride along, too!



Review panel: three panels analyzed same issue, held focus groups

Continued from p. 2

available resources.

- Unsatisfactory respite care for foster parents.
- Insufficient information provided to foster parents about the children and their unique needs.
- Foster parents do not feel respected or that they are a member of the child's care team.
- Financial barriers (e.g., foster parents are not compensated for day care if they are non-relatives).
- Burnout of foster parents.

This topic is important to panels and the larger community because all children in substitute care deserve appropriate and nurturing placements. Being a foster parent can be challenging. If foster parents do not feel supported or they are frustrated, they will likely stop providing substitute care. Without foster homes, where would we place children? Finding, training, respecting and maintaining foster parents is critical to keeping children in foster care in Oregon safe and happy.

For the first time since the CRB has taken over the administration of citizen review panels, the three panels analyzed the same issue. The panels in Multnomah and Lane counties developed a foster parent survey that was

completed by 264 foster parents. The Lane County panel also held two focus groups and heard from approximately 40 foster parents. The results of the survey have been shared with DHS and informed the panels as they developed their recommendations for DHS. Some of the recommendations from the three panels include:

- DHS secure funding to continue a grant-funded foster parent support and retention staff position.
- DHS compile and maintain a list of approved respite providers and provide this list to foster families.
- DHS develop a closure or wrap-up procedure for caseworkers to carry out with foster parents when a child leaves their care.
- DHS expand the types of ongoing trainings available to foster parents.

More information about the work of citizen review panels across the county can be found online at www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp/

*** Lisa Romano, CRB field manager for Lane County during the past two years, was recently hired as Executive Director of the Oregon Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Network.**

Secondary trauma: acknowledging problem is first step to resolving it

Cont. from p. 3

Providing opportunities to debrief informally and process traumatic material with supervisors and peers is also helpful.

It has only been recently that researchers have acknowledged that persons who work with or help traumatized persons are at risk of developing the same symptoms as persons directly affected by the trauma.

Acknowledging that secondary trauma is a possibility in the hard work we do every day is the first step to promoting solutions.

Simply naming the stress of the work may help workers feel supported and give them permission to seek solutions for whatever stress they may experience.

This acknowledgment will lead to a healthier environment for both the workers and the children and families we serve.

We do this work because we care. Remember to take care of yourself, too.

Mission: fundamental reform key to stopping deaths in child protection

Cont. from p. 1

such as a multidisciplinary response program in the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community near Phoenix, Ariz.

The report states that eliminating deaths in child protection will require fundamental reform, particularly as it pertains to mental health and criminal issues that parents may be experiencing.

“These conditions do not excuse harmful behaviors toward children, but they do help to explain why no single agency, acting alone, can address all of the complex circumstances in troubled families’ lives.”

Identifying children and families most at risk of a maltreatment fatality, sharing data electronically and in real time, and increased accountability among providers are all goals needed to start saving lives now, the report says.

It also recommends creating strategies for populations in need of special attention, consolidating state plans to eliminate child abuse, more funding, and grounding child protection decisions in better data and research. To view the report, [CLICK HERE.](#)



Citizen Review Board members Diane Flansburg (left, Lincoln County) and Michal Alkoff (right, Yamhill County) recently met with Oregon Chief Justice Thomas Balmer to review the CRB's new 5-year strategic plan.

New CRB Volunteers!

BENTON COUNTY

Theresa Hedrick

Bridget Tyler

Linda Ward

JACKSON COUNTY

Michael Skibinski

Cindy Williams

LANE COUNTY

Amy Brewer

Joan Moore

MARION COUNTY

Sheila Brewington

UMATILLA COUNTY

Crystal Pleninger

UNION COUNTY

Bethany Stevens

“Every Day Counts” Conference!

May 6-7, 2016

Hilton Eugene

Eugene, Oregon

For online registration, click [HERE](#).

Juvenile dependency court stakeholders are invited to attend. CLE credits are available! Resitration fee for child welfare stakeholders is \$45, and includes all educational sessions, refreshments, breakfast, lunch and CLE credit. Dinner on May 7 is reserved for CRB members and their guests, OJD staff and presenters. Send checks payable to: Oregon Judicial Dept, CRB Attn: Volunteer Coordinator, 1163 State St. Salem OR 97301

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