

# SURVEY OF THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

## 1. What is the one thing the child welfare “system” is doing well?

Child Welfare has worked to increase and monitor systems of continuous quality improvement across our programs, stemming from the recent Governor’s Executive Order and A&M Consulting technical assistance. We also are grateful to have a dedicated staff who are focused on making a positive difference in the lives of children and families in the state of Oregon.

Implementing predictive analytics into their work.

Working with foster families and potential foster families to provide care for the dependency out of home placements.

Serving the needs of and quickly finding permanent homes for very young babies.

Making people aware that abuse and neglect is occurring to our children in our communities.

There are many people who are sincerely dedicated to improving the lives of children and their parents

I think that, through JCIP, the child welfare system has done a good job bringing together representatives of participants in the system to check in with each other and gather statistical information regarding cases. This communication and information collection put us in a good position to identify improvements that need to be made. I also think the system is full of dedicated, hard-working, innovative participants who want to do the best they can for children and families.

The child welfare system is doing a pretty good job of getting to permanency hearings within 425 days of filing. In the third quarter of 2019, 90% of permanency hearings were held within 425 days of filing.

I think the system has a really good process for putting outcomes/targets in place, and then measuring them. For example, measuring the number of days to get to jurisdiction.

Collaborative approach to working together. System partners consistently dialog and look for creative solutions for system improvements.

Placing children with relatives.

Protecting children from serious abuse and neglect

Child Welfare appears to be increasing its efforts to engage the community in how it recruits and develops training for staff, contracts for services and writes its policies and procedures. This enables the agency to receive and consider diverse perspectives and offers insight into how different communities - particularly communities of color and the LGBTQ+ community - may be disproportionately impacted by its policies, procedures and practices.

## 2. What is the one thing the child welfare “system” is doing the worst?

One struggle the Child Welfare system has is not having enough targeted capacity for foster home and residential treatment options for children in care. Through the Department’s Office of Reporting, Research, Implementation and Analytics we are engaged in research to assess the types and numbers of placement options we need and have initiatives under the Governor’s Executive Order to pursue them in partnership with other state agencies, etc., particularly for residential treatment services. This is combined with the challenge of cross system partnerships that must be increased to maximize funding opportunities and resources.

Training and supporting competent staff.

Wasting money in several areas that could/should be tightened up. Part of this waste includes the lack of stability and constant training of new staff and attorneys.

Serving the needs of and quickly finding permanent homes for very young babies.

The system is disrupting the “family” unit.

There is little creativity in trying to meet the problems of families and many decisions are based out of liability concerns rather than what is best for the children and/or families

Given my limited perspective, I need more information before answering this question with confidence. But, I can say that I have questions about whether the system places children outside their homes too frequently or for too long. With others from JCIP, I attended the National Judicial Leadership Summit on Child Welfare in September and many of the speakers focused on the trauma done to children by removals. So, I wonder, could more children be left with parents? Could more children be placed by their parents with other relatives or friends without state approval of that placement? Should courts have more appearances at the outset of cases to see what can be done to place children back in their homes or with others chosen by their parents? Should more visitation be the norm? What can the system do to better assist parents; are changes in parent representation necessary?

The child welfare system is not doing so well at getting to jurisdiction. In the third quarter of 2019, 54% of cases had a jurisdiction finding within 60 days and 73% had a jurisdiction finding within 90 days. 44% of cases had a jurisdiction finding on both parents within 60 days, while just 62% had a jurisdiction finding on both parents within 90 days.

I feel like event though we have systems in place for measure our targets/outcomes, we don’t spend enough quality time assessing why/how we are meeting or not meeting targets and then developing plans on how to make changes ensure we continue to improve. I don’t think the “system” has a good continuous process improvement plan. We don’t do enough “plan, do, check and adjust.”

Inadequate system response to placement needs for higher needs children – and other systems tend to drop off assuming the dependency system will be a final catch-all.

Meeting the needs of children, providing adequate services for parents, keeping children in their communities, valuing parents and treating them with respect, providing adequate parenting time. Our child welfare system often inflicts significant trauma upon vulnerable children and parents.

DHS lacks a well-qualified and well compensated workforce, due to (a) the failure of Oregon colleges and universities to provide comprehensive child welfare education that focuses on concrete job-related knowledge and skills and (b) pay and working conditions that are insufficient to attract and retain well qualified child welfare workers.

Caring for its employees - making them feel valued and secure in their positions, offering them opportunities and support to engage in self-care, the ability to learn and grow in their positions by ensuring reasonable caseload assignments to new and developing staff, and to create an environment in which staff feel safe making mistakes in order to learn (while also being held reasonably accountable for those mistakes).

### **3. What is the one thing the public thinks the child welfare “system” is doing well?**

Child Welfare’s staff workloads have been a challenge across the program, but we are grateful for the recent hiring surge of nearly 350 new staff across the state, which will decrease caseloads and workloads of staff. The Department utilized a rapid hiring and deployment approach, drawing in help from other agencies to bring relief to our frontline staff faster and that it was complete within five months.

Improved efforts on foster home recruitment

Having judges who provide a check to DHS’ authority.

Serving the needs of teens.

Believe the public perceives the system is not handling anything well.

In many cases the system protects children by removing them vulnerable and dangerous situations

Hopefully, given recent state actions, the public thinks that the system is recognizing that improvements need to be made and is taking steps to make them, including hiring more case workers.

I have no real way to provide an answer to this, outside of a few, limited scope op-ed pieces published in the newspaper. I’d be interested in reading any public opinion polls that may exist. Otherwise, I’d simply be speculating.

The “public” does not seem to think of any other entity besides DHS (the child welfare *agency*) as the child welfare *system*. As such, the public sees a consistent stream of negative media coverage. The positive cases and outcomes can’t be shared with the public due to confidentiality restrictions which adds to the one-sided view.

Sadly, I’m not sure the public thinks the “system” is doing much of anything well.

If media coverage is any indication, it is difficult to say.

This is hard to know, as I work so closely with the system.

Possibly nothing.

#### **4. What is the one thing the public thinks the child welfare “system” is doing poorly?**

The current work to centralizing a statewide hotline has not been without challenges and as this is a key external facing access point to the CW system, this is known to be a point of concern. Lengthy wait times for the general population continues to be a challenge.

Everything

Exerting too much power over families. Too much individual discretion and personal bias in decision making.

Removing children from harmful environments in order to protect them.

Conversely, it is my sense the general public thinks the “system” in general is doing poorly.

Not keeping children safe generally (foster care, placements, in home).

Perception is that the system is doing a very poor job of placing children in foster care.

Many foster care placements result in harm and exploitation of foster children

I think the public hears about two types of juvenile cases in the media: (1) cases where the state failed to intervene and protect a child whose parents were harming the child and (2) cases where the state intervened to protect a child, but the child placed with someone who harmed the child. Both of these situations are rare; that is why they make the news. But, they likely generate public opinion that the system is not working properly because it is under-resourced and, consequently, unable to adequately investigate and unable to have sufficient safe placements for children. I also think that the public thinks that juvenile cases take too long to move through the court system. But, there is a tension between giving families a chance to overcome their problems and moving cases quickly.

Out of state placements has been a very hot topic concerning public concern for the child welfare system.

The public and legislature both appear frustrated by the agency's lack of consistent progress and follow-through on areas identified in past audits, including recruiting, retaining and caring for staff, and addressing disproportionality.

This is hard to know, as I work so closely with the system.

Due to stories in the media:

Finding appropriate out-of-home placements.

Preventing child deaths and severe injuries.

## 5. What is the one thing the child welfare “system” should do?

There is no quick fix when addressing systemic issues, but we feel continuing to expand community partnerships to highlight abuse prevention, increasing collaboration between our public and private organizations, and building care capacity across the state will make an enormous difference in supporting all Oregon families and their children.

Provide competent coaching to their staff that includes hands-on training with highly skilled coaches that does not necessarily equate to a supervisor.

Make the process less cumbersome/complicated and more attainable for parents to successfully reunite with their children in the cases where this is appropriate. The requirements are almost insurmountable and the education level of families in the system is far below what most of them would need to understand what is going on.

Keeping children in their custody safe and providing appropriate placements for children.

Push out more positive stories on a proactive basis. Talk about the work of community partners/stakeholders in a positive way.

Also, utilize community stakeholders/partners to gather their input for ways to improve the system, especially input from community stakeholders who are “boots on the ground” working with the “system”.

Reach outside of and engage its dependency system partners (mental health, juvenile justice, treatment providers, housing, etc.) to work together on areas needing improvement. Should expand its idea of what entities are included within the circle of a child welfare “system.”

The child welfare system should protect children from abusive neglectful situations while preserving the family unit.

Encourage more creative solutions and not resort to cookie cutter solutions

From my appellate perspective, I can say that there have been numerous cases in recent years about how various juvenile statutes work together. One thing the system could do is to review the juvenile statutes to clarify the procedures courts must follow.

Focus on training staff to be diverse in their approach and consistent in their application of child welfare policy.

Continue its efforts to create a culture shift within the agency to be more trauma informed (both inward facing, in its treatment and support of staff, and outward facing, in staff's treatment and support of its customers, and the layout and orientation of its facilities) and extend those efforts to educate to include community partners - including service providers, the educational and healthcare systems, courts and law enforcement.

Make every effort to keep children at home by prioritizing support and services for families, even before child welfare system involvement. Presume that parenting time is unsupervised unless safety demands otherwise.

Develop a long-term vision of a much more professionalized workforce and then implement it.

Improve the preservation of families and the prevention of unnecessary foster placements.

## **6. What is the one thing the JCIP should do to improve the child welfare “system”?**

Child Welfare greatly values the relationship with JCIP and we see benefit to working with JCIP to identify areas for collaboration that would streamline the judicial experiences for families as well as training opportunities from a cross-systems perspective for CW employees with judicial leadership.

Advocate for additional juvenile court resources, time, judges, and provide training to those who precede over dependency hearings.

Provide more tools to educate the public/stakeholders/ local agencies on the best practices in child welfare.

Strive to place children with people who know them. Use a best interest standard when choosing a placement and prioritizing that standard over agency rules.

Put teams in place to help analyze what is working, what isn't and develop and implement ideas to help make improvements. For example, if a county is not making improvements in the jurisdiction within 60 days, put a team in place to help identify why, and identify changes to make to help get do the target outcomes. Personally, I love to ask the why questions and dig into problems and identify possible solutions. I am a big proponent of continuous process improvement teams!

Consistency in practice, process, forms. Would result in similar treatment for families engaging in the system across the state, as well as better align expectation outcomes for individual counties.

Provide a “step” process to improve the system – not giant “steps” but “baby” step improvements which will create overall systemic improvements to the system. The steps should be charted out with specific measurable goals for each step. The system did not break overnight and will not be repaired by one specific change. The “steps” should be agreed upon by all stakeholders recognizing that each proposed step is walking toward and overall monumental shift in how child welfare is handled in the state. Perhaps use sequential intercept mapping to determine what organizations/programs/providers interact with families/parents/children to best determine where step changes can most effectively be implemented to have a positive outcome for the children/families.

Highlight new and creative approaches to problem solving

I think JCIP should review the Oregon-specific information provided at the National Judicial Leadership Summit on Child Welfare, as well as the materials concerning other jurisdictions' “standards” or “best

practices,” and determine what improvements we can implement – in both the short and long term – to improve our system.

Develop reports that measure successful outcomes of children in the child welfare system and then disseminate the methods the most successful courts employ across the state. Standardization would also be key.

I think the JCIP strategic plan does a good job of identifying ways that JCIP can improve the juvenile court system.

Sharply reduce delays, especially in TPR and adoption, partly by speeding court procedures and partly by being tougher and more focused in juvenile oversight of agency delays.

Improve judicial expertise in child welfare, through judicial infrastructure improvements.

Inform (and encourage) our judicial officers on how to hold the child welfare program to a higher level of accountability, consistent with *the spirit* of the ASFA, ICWA and other federal and state laws intended to protect and provide for the unique needs of our families. At times it appears tempting for our judges to hold the agency accountable for what it 'can do' based upon its present and expressed abilities, rather than what it may reasonably need to do to effectively aid and assist its increasingly diverse customer base.