Ah, summer! It brings more heat, more leisure, and often more family get-togethers and celebrations. Although we all recognize the importance of the involvement of both parents in a child’s development, one article in this month’s Bulletin features specific tips on “Engaging Top-Notch Dads” in their children’s lives, as our tribute to Father’s Day.

Summer also signals the end of the Legislative session, and this month’s issue includes “2008 Legislative Changes in Child Welfare,” presenting highlights of the new legislation impacting child protection, as well as the “Legislative Training Implementation Plan,” addressing the various ways in which the new legislation will be presented and/or trained to all child welfare staff.

Unfortunately, summer also brings more potential risks for the children we serve, and you may wish to familiarize yourself with the helpful tips provided in both “Water Safety—It’s EVERYONE’S Job!” and “Keeping Children Safe in the Car,” and then share this important information with the parents and caregivers with whom you work. Feel free to reproduce these helpful articles and provide copies to your families.

As always, we welcome your comments and feedback about this or any issue of the Training Bulletin, as well as topic suggestions, “best practice” articles, kudos from your customers, innovative problem-solving strategies, and good news to share. We look forward to hearing from you! For any questions about or submissions to the Training Bulletin, please contact Arlene Carey at (850) 921-1928, or by e-mail at: Arlene_Carey@dcf.state.fl.us
2008 LegisLative UPDATE

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE  continued from page 1

SB 78 – Child Welfare Professionals
Recognizes the second Monday in May as “Child Professionals Recognition Day,” to recognize the efforts of all professionals who work with abused children and dysfunctional families.

HB 625 – Independent Living
Provides appropriate caregivers the ability to participate in the development of a written plan for age-appropriate activities for foster children, requires the Independent Living Services Advisory Council to complete an analysis of other state practices regarding young adults who attain 18 years of age while in foster care prior to completing high school, and removes the disability of nonage of minors in foster care for the purpose of securing utility services upon reaching the age 18.

HB 653 – Corporate Income Tax Scholarship Program
Extends the Corporate Income Tax Scholarship program eligibility requirements to children in foster care.

HB 663 – Adoption
Requires an adoption entity to disclose background information on a child to a pre-adoptive parent prior to the final hearing on the petition for adoption.

HB 7007 – Safe Newborn Abandonment
Increases the age (3 to 7 days) by which a newborn may be safely abandoned pursuant to s. 383.50, F.S. It allows a mother to remain anonymous on a birth certificate and it strengthens the presumption of consent to termination of parental rights when a parent surrenders the child.

HB7077 – Child Protection
Definition of Abandonment
39.01(1) & (32)(e)
Modifies definition of Abandonment... must “establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship...”

Child on Child Sexual Abuse
39.01(14)
Creates a definition for child ages 12 and under who exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior to distinguish the child from an alleged juvenile sexual offender.

Definition of Harm 39.01(32)(g)
Redefines “harm” for the purposes of establishing when a child is exposed to a controlled substance or alcohol. A test administered at birth containing any amount of alcohol or controlled substance that was not administered for medical treatment equates harm without further showings of “demonstrable adverse effects.”

Missing Children 39.0121(16), 39.0141, 787.04, 937.021
Requires missing children reports be taken from the Department and investigated by Law Enforcement. This applies when child is in state custody or under court-ordered supervision, as well as when there is an open investigation case.

Background Screening 39.0138(1)
Provides for background checks on all individuals in the home as well as frequent visitors before a placement can be made with a non-relative, non licensed placement.

Electronic Abuse Reports 39.201
Allows for fax and web-based abuse reports to be received by the Hotline.

Quick Fact: What is an Enrolled Bill?
An Enrolled Bill is one that has passed both houses of the legislature in identical form, and has been converted into an act for presentation to the Governor or Secretary of the State. The Governor must approve the Bill (with or without signature), in order for it to become law.

For full copies of Enrolled Bills, visit www.flsenate.org

When the Florida Senate homepage appears, you will see “Jump to Bill” on the left—just type in the number of the Bill you wish to view (for example, 1950), then click “Go” (make sure you’re in the 2008 session!), and the information specific to that Bill will appear. Scroll down to where you see “Bills—Version,” and find the Bill number that has “ER” after it, typically the last one listed (“ER” stands for “Enrolled,” which means it’s the final version). Remember when reading the Bills, words stricken are deletions, and words underlined are additions. HB is House Bill; SB is Senate Bill.
Investigative Time Frames for Case Closure 39.301(16)
Provides an exception to the 60 day requirement to close all investigations, in instances of open law enforcement investigations, missing children, and when medical examiner reports are necessary.

Placement with Adoptive Parent of a Child’s Siblings 39.401(2), 39.521(3)
Allows law enforcement/DCF to release to/place a child with the adoptive parent of a child’s sibling.

Non-Relative Placements 39.401(5)
Requires court approval for any non-relative placement, and after 12 months, the non-relative placement must seek foster care licensure, or establish permanent guardianship, or obtain court approval to continue after 12 months.

Notice to Foster Parents and Pre-Adoptive Parents 39.502(17)
Establishes that children 13+ years, foster, and pre-adoptive parents must receive either oral or written notice of each court hearing at least 72 hours before the scheduled court hearing.

Electronic Search Capabilities 39.503
Recognizes internet search engines as an additional valid means to locate people.

Injunctions 39.504
Establishes new procedures for use of injunctions in dependency cases and investigations. The Department will now be able to seek injunctions prior to removal of a child.

Adjudication of Dependency 39.507
Requires that there be only one adjudication/adjudicatory trial for any child alleged to be dependent, but the court must determine whether each parent has abused, neglected, or abandoned the child in a subsequent evidentiary hearing.

Pre-Disposition Report 39.521
Provides for a judicial determination that a pre-disposition report need not be filed at the time of disposition if all of the required information is already contained in court records.

Notice to Children of JRs 39.701
Requires a served copy of Judicial Review to be given to a child and the attorney for a child.

Digital Imaged Licenses 322.142
Allows the Department of Motor Vehicles to share color photographic and digital imaged license records with the Department for purposes of conducting child protective investigations.

Student Loan Reimbursement 402.101
Authorizes the Department to provide student loan reimbursement to eligible employees as specifically funded.

Vehicle Insurance 409.1671
Allows a lead community-based care provider’s insurance carrier to provide a minimum limit of $1 million in non-owned automobile liability coverage for automobiles owned by employees or employee’s household members, but only while used in connection with the provider’s business.

Maintenance Adoption Subsidies Section 31
Provides the Legislative Budget Commission authority to release funds for Maintenance Adoption Subsidies.

Amends and establishes new grounds for termination of parental rights, including when:
• A parent fails to comply with a case plan within 9 months.

The Florida Legislature passed a number of Bills impacting how child protection professionals serve Florida’s children and families.

- A parent commits aggravated child abuse, sexual battery, sexual abuse or chronic abuse on any child,
- A parent commits murder, manslaughter, aiding or abetting murder, conspiracy or solicitation to murder of another parent,
- A parent has an extensive history of alcohol or controlled substance abuse rendering them incapable of caring for a child, and the parent has refused or failed to receive treatment in the 3-year period immediately preceding the filing of the termination of parental rights petition,
- A child tests positive for alcohol or a controlled substance at birth and the mother has another biological child who was adjudicated dependent due to alcohol or substance exposure and the mother had an opportunity to participate in treatment as a result, or
- A parent had a child placed in out of home care due to conditions caused by the parent on three or more occasions.

For further information on the 2008 Legislative Changes in Child Welfare, please contact Julie Mayo at: (850) 922-0375, or by e-mail at: Julie_Mayo@dcf.state.fl.us
The Alternative Response System (ARS) Pilot Began on April 16, 2008

By Chris Compton, Office of Family Safety

Since child maltreatment comes in many forms and in varying degrees of severity, the central idea of “Alternative Response” is to allow for a differentiated response (i.e., traditional investigation vs. family assessment) based on the severity of the abuse or neglect alleged, the completion of an initial safety assessment, and the family’s recognition and willingness to accept help.

Use of alternative response is predicated on the theory that by engaging families in a less threatening way, the family will more likely acknowledge problems and agree to receive services designed to address the underlying conditions and contributing factors placing their children at risk.

The primary goal of Alternative Response Systems (ARS) is to get families who are involved in low risk abuse and neglect (that typically does not rise to the legal threshold for court ordered involvement) to engage voluntarily in programs and services that can enhance child safety. The key element of this engagement process is an offer to work with these marginalized families using a non-traditional response which emphasizes family assessments and the resultant disposition, without the need to formally identify the caregiver as responsible for abuse or neglect as indicated by the standard investigative closure findings.

Many states have already incorporated a version of Alternative Response into their formal child protection systems, including Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia, to name a few. Florida’s version of Alternative Response was developed as a result of a statewide effort, including representation from Operations, Community–Based Care, Sheriff’s Offices, and Family Safety Program Office personnel. Staff from the nationally-recognized Child Welfare Institute facilitated the planning and design sessions over a two year period, leading up to the pilot implementation.

Three pilot sites are participating in the project - Circuit 4 (Duval County), Circuit 14 (Bay County), and Circuit 18 (Seminole County). Both the Bay and Duval County sites involve Department Child Protective Investigators working in collaboration with their Community-Based Care counterparts, Big Bend Community Based Care, Inc. and Partnerships for Strong Families, respectively. The Seminole County Sheriff’s Department is working with Community Based Care of Seminole, Inc., at the third site.

The pilot will continue for six months, after which a final evaluation report will be reviewed, to determine success and future implementation.

For further information about the ARS Pilot, please contact Chris Compton at (850) 443–6646, or by e-mail at: chris_compton@dcf.state.fl.us

April 2008 Memos

The notifications listed below were submitted from the Office of Family Safety to the Regional Directors during April 2008. These notifications can be found on the Network’s “F” drive in the PDFS Resource Management subfolder entitled “2008 Memos Sent to RDs_CAs_CBCs_SOs”.

Please note that notifications with attachments are divided into folders by the month in which they were submitted.

These notifications can also be found on the DCF Document Repository website, at http://eww.dcf.state.fl.us/~fsp/newpages/repository/repository.shtml#fshead under the Office of Family Safety, along with information posted by other offices.

Please note that policy memos (and a wealth of other information!) are also available to everyone in the Knowledge Library of the Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare, located at: http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/

- April 2 – Supervising for Excellence Trainer Minimum Qualifications
- April 4 – Independent Living Fair Hearings and the Office of the Attorney General
- April 18 – April 2008 Family Safety “Special Bulletin” on “No Jurisdiction” Closures
- April 23 – Florida Safe Families Network User Training (Release 2a Common Functionality)
- April 23 – Training for Florida Administrative Code 65C-13
- April 23 – Family Safety – Quality Assurance Review Template
- April 28 – June 2008 Regional Trainings
- April 30 – Enterprise Client Index System – Vital Statistics Statewide Rollout
The well-being of children and families begins with responsible fathers. It also begins with you. Research tells us that children with involved fathers enjoy more positive outcomes in many domains, including self-esteem, school performance and social development. You, working with the many families we serve, can make a difference every day.

Families and communities play a critical role in helping fathers stay involved with, and supportive of, their kids. This article is designed to help you facilitate the ongoing engagement of fathers or father-like family members, learn about why being an actively involved dad is so important, and learn creative and effective strategies for dads getting and staying involved in the lives of their children.

Researchers stress that parents must be actively and positively involved in their child’s life to contribute to the healthy development of their child. Fathers who are active in their child’s life will have a tremendous effect on their child’s development—both cognitively and socially. Having the experience of two involved parents adds variety and dimension to the child’s experience of the world.

Recognize that the non-custodial parent, often the dad, must make a special effort to maintain a close and loving relationship with the children.

Father absence refers to when children grow up without a father in their lives, particularly in their homes. Recent research shows that children who live without their fathers are more likely to be poor, use drugs, experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, be victims of child abuse, and engage in criminal behavior, than are their peers who live with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents.

While the research can be daunting, there is good news. A loving and nurturing father improves outcomes for children, families and communities. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors including drug use, truancy, and criminal activity. Young children whose fathers are involved in their lives tend to make better, longer-lasting friendships across their lifespan. Children raised with responsible fathers tend to get along better with their peers, be academically successful, stay in school longer, use drugs and alcohol less frequently, and don’t become pregnant or get someone else pregnant. Some researchers believe that active father involvement has a positive effect on their child’s math skills!

Prevent Child Abuse Florida provides us with the following tips for our dads! Please share.

**Tips for Fathers with Special Challenges**

Being a father is your most important job and plays an important role in the lives of your children. It can bring your life new meaning, joy and responsibilities. A child learns a lot from his or her father; it gives you the opportunity to teach your child what you know, be a source for inner strength, share your values, and become a positive role model in your child’s life.

If you live apart from your child:

Stay involved

- Attend events – for example, at school or in sports.
- If you can’t attend a recital, play or

continued on page 6
other special event in your child’s life, ask someone to make a video of it for you. Make a point of watching the video with your child. If you can’t be with your child, share your enthusiasm.

- Stay in touch with regular phone calls, letters or e-mail.

**Keep your promises**

If you’re able to visit your child:
- Arrive on time.
- Never be a “no-show”.
- Be careful that gifts and movies don’t take the place of conversation and real attention.

**Watch how you treat your child’s mother**

Try not to:
- Criticize her in front of your child.
- Have your child carry messages between you.

**If you’re a single parent:**

Remember that your child is a child
- It can be tempting to treat your child as if he or she were another adult – and your best friend. But putting a child in an adult role can harm his or her emotional development.

**Set Limits**

- If single fathers feel bad that there’s no mother in a child’s life, they may unknowingly spoil the child. By granting every wish, they try to make up for the attention and love the child isn’t getting from a mother. But not setting limits can hurt your child’s understanding of rules and consequences.

**If you’re a stepfather:**

Understand why your stepchild may be rejecting you. Your stepchild may feel that:
- Accepting you means betraying his or her biological father.
- You are a rival for his or her moth-

**Research tells us that children with involved fathers enjoy more positive outcomes in many domains, including self-esteem, school performance and social development.**

Be patient. Full acceptance can take years.

**If your child has a disability:**

Contact the local school
- Its special education staff can refer you to organizations and therapists that can help your child before and after he or she starts school.

**Get Support**

- Learn all you can about your child’s disability. Contact parent support groups in your local area – for example Circle of Parents.

For further information on engaging fathers, please contact Johana Hatcher at (850) 488-1929, or by e-mail at: Johana_Hatcher@dcf.state.fl.us
Keeping Children Safe in the Car

REDUCING THE RISK OF CRASH-RELATED INJURY

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages birth through 14. When used correctly, child safety car seats reduce the child’s risk of serious injury and death by over 50 percent.

WHO MUST USE A CHILD SAFETY CAR SEAT?

Use a child safety car seat for your baby and any child under five every time they ride in the car, it’s the law! The fine for not having a child correctly restrained is $60; additionally, three points will be added to your driver’s license.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT CAR SEAT?

The best car seat is the one that fits your child, fits your vehicle, and fits your family’s needs in terms of budget, comfort and convenience. The age and size of your child will determine what type of car seat you need.

Here are some guidelines from the National safe kids campaign:

- Infants must ride in a rear-facing car seat until they are at least 1 year old and weigh at least 20 pounds.
- Children over 1 year old and weighing between 20 and 40 pounds can be placed in a forward-facing car seat.
- Children over 40 pounds who no longer fit in the forward-facing car seat need to use a booster seat to correctly position the vehicle’s lap and shoulder belts. Do not use a booster seat without a shoulder belt. Booster seats are needed until the child is big enough for the adult safety belt to fit correctly, usually around 8 years of age.
- Around age 8 a child will be big enough to sit all the way back on the seat of the car with knees bent easily over the edge of the seat, the lap belt low and flat across the hips, and the shoulder belt across the middle of the shoulder and chest. At this point, both the adult lap and shoulder belts should be used. Never put the shoulder belt under a child’s arm or behind the back, as this increases the risk of severe injury in a crash.

Additional tips for choosing the best seat for your child:

- A car seat with a five-point harness system will provide the best fit and the most protection for babies and toddlers of all sizes. The harness should fit snugly with the chest clip at armpit level to keep the shoulder straps in place.
- A child may outgrow a car seat before exceeding the weight limit. It is important to be sure your child’s head remains at least one inch below the top of the car seat to ensure proper protection of the child’s head during a crash.
- Although booster seats with shields may meet current Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards for use by children who weigh 30 to 40 pounds, the American Academy of pediatrics does not recommend their use.
- Used car seats are not recommended, as they could be missing parts, be damaged from a previous accident, or may have been recalled. If you cannot afford to buy a new car seat, call your local health department or law enforcement office for assistance.

CAR SAFETY BY AGE

- Less than 1 yr + less than 20 lbs = rear-facing car seat
- 1 yr + 20 lbs = forward-facing car seat
- Over 40 lbs = forward-facing booster seat
- 8 yrs and older = back seat with adult seatbelt
Water Safety – It’s EVERYONE’S Job!

A swimming pool or other body of water in the yard can present a very dangerous area for children. Drowning is the number one cause of death for children under five in Florida, Arizona, and California, with a ranking of number two for over a dozen other states. For every drowning, there are eleven near drowning incidents, according to government statistics, many of which result in totally disabling brain damage.

- To protect your family from a potentially fatal accident, the following is recommended:

- Never leave your children alone in or near the bathtub, a pool, or any water, even for a moment. Do not be distracted by doorbells, phone calls, chores or conversations. If you must leave the bathroom, pool or water area, take the children with you, making sure the bathroom door is closed, and/or the pool area gate latches securely when it closes. During social gatherings at or near water, appoint a “designated watcher” to protect children from water accidents. Adults may take turns being the “watcher”. When adults become preoccupied, children are at risk around ANY containers of water or liquid, even toilets and bathtubs!

- Post rules such as: “No Running.” “No dunking” and “Never swim alone.” Enforce the rules!

- Instruct baby sitters about potential water hazards to children, even in the bathtub, and about the use of protective devices, such as door alarms and latches. Emphasize the need for contact supervision. Be sure the person watching your children knows how to swim, to get emergency help and to perform CPR.

- If a child is missing, check the pool, bathtub, or water area first. Seconds count in preventing death or disability. Go to the edge of the pool or water area and scan the entire area, bottom of pool and surface of pool or water area.

- Install a fence to separate your house from the water area. Most children who drown in water wander out of the house and fall into the water. The fence should be at least 5-feet high and completely surround the water area. The fence must completely separate the water area from the house and the play area of the yard.

- Use self-closing gates that self-latch, with latches higher than your children’s reach. Never prop open the gate to a water area. After the children are done swimming, secure the water area so they can’t get back into it.

- Never use a pool with its pool cover partially in place, since children may become entrapped under it. Remove the cover completely.

- Place tables, chairs and other objects well away from the water area fence to prevent children from using them to climb into the water area.

- Keep rescue equipment (such as shepherd’s crook or rescue tube) and a telephone with emergency numbers noted by the water.

- Avoid air-filled “swimming aids” because they are not a substitute for approved life vests and can be dangerous should they deflate.

- Keep toys out of and away from water area when not in use. Children playing with or reaching for toys could accidentally fall in the water.

- Remember, teaching your children how to swim DOES NOT mean your children are safe in the water.

- Always, always, ALWAYS watch children in or near any pool, bathtub or other water hazard.

- Don’t assume that drowning or a drowning accident couldn’t happen to you or your family.

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Subsidized Child Care Eligibility (Update)

There has been some confusion in the past regarding what constitutes an official referral for services for subsidized child care, when the child is being cared for by a relative who receives benefits under the Relative Caregiver Program.

The following information is being reprinted from a May 1, 2008 Relative Caregiver Memo which the Agency for Workforce Innovation (responsible for administering the School Readiness Program), Office of Early Learning, sent to the Early Learning Coalitions clarifying this issue:

“Under the Department of Children and Family [Services] (DCF) rule 65C-24.008, F.A.C., ‘[s]ubsidized child care shall be available to Relative Caregiver Program recipients through the T.A.N.F. At-Risk category.’ The Agency rule 60BB-4.207, F.A.C., regarding eligibility for children in the Relative Caregiver Program, states as follows:

(1) Initial eligibility. Eligibility under this category is not dependent on family income or work requirements and will instead be based on a documented referral from the Department of Children and Family Services, or its contracted provider.

(2) Maintaining eligibility. A child may continue to maintain eligibility under this category if there is a current and valid referral from the Department of Children and Family Services or its contracted provider (emphasis added).

(3) Prior to disenrolling any child under this category, the coalition or its designee shall contact the referral agency to verify continued eligibility.

It has come to the Agency’s attention that it is difficult to determine whether a “current and valid referral” exists. Because the term ‘referral’ is not defined in the rule, the Agency will accept written documentation from DCF or its contracted providers in order to verify continued eligibility. Once such documentation has been provided, an Early Learning Coalition should provide child care under the relative caregiver rules as stated above, which together should ensure that children who are Relative Caregiver Program recipients receive child care services.”

It is our understanding, from the Office of Early Learning, that the “referral” in cases such as these is simply documentation that the family is currently receiving Relative Caregiver Program benefits.

Should you have any questions, or should you require any additional clarification on this issue, please contact Michele DiMonaco, Program Policy Supervisor, Agency for Workforce Innovation, at (850) 921-3195.

Save the Date

2008 Dependency Summit

This conference is designed for:
Advocates - Attorneys - Child Investigation Professionals - Child Protection Professionals and Stakeholders from the local judicial circuits - Community Based Care Providers - Guardians Ad Litem - Juvenile Justice Professionals - Law Enforcement Professionals - Mental Health and Medical Child Welfare Providers - as well as any other affiliated parties.

Registration information to follow!
Independent Living

Florida Youth SHINE Changes Lives on Capitol Hill

By Catherine Heath,
Office of Family Safety

Approximately twenty young adults from Florida Youth SHINE dedicated five days to improving the lives of youth in foster care and adults formerly in foster care. Youth SHINE stands for “Striving High for Independence and Empowerment” and teaches young adults currently and formerly in foster care to advocate for themselves and how to educate others on the foster care system in the state of Florida. Members of Youth SHINE are from all over the state of Florida and dedicate their time to improve the child welfare system.

This five-day event started on Saturday, March 29th and lasted until April 2nd, 2008. Often working late into the night, members of Youth SHINE prepared presentations and questions, and reviewed bills for the current Legislative session. Issues of critical concerns were selected by members and prioritized by the Youth SHINE members in preparation of their meeting with Department Leadership, the Legislature, and others.

Legislative Analysts from the House of Representatives and representatives from the Department of Children and Families and the Florida Coalition for Children met with Youth SHINE on Saturday and Sunday. Erin Geraghty from the DCF Office of Communications delivered training on “How to Deliver an Effective Presentation to An Audience of Policy Makers or to the Media with Confidence and Ease.” This was just one of the many presentations and events for Youth SHINE members held in coordination with other agencies.

After preparing and working all weekend, Youth SHINE met with DCF Secretary Bob Butterworth, Deputy Secretary Don Winstead, Assistant Secretary for Operations George Sheldon, and Director of Family Safety Pat Badland. In a powerful presentation, members of Youth SHINE addressed several critical issues currently facing youth in foster care and adults who have exited out of foster care.

As part of the Department of Children and Families’ partnership with Florida’s Children First and Florida Youth SHINE, the “Rights and Expectations for Children and Youth in Shelter or Foster Care” was developed and first printed in 2007. Youth SHINE members requested an update on the dissemination of this user-friendly wallet or full-size brochure to youth in foster care. Department Leadership continued their commitment to the production and distribution of this important document, including its availability on the new Independent Living website.

Later in the afternoon, members of Youth SHINE met with Judge Nikki Clark regarding the Families and Children in the Courts Committee she chairs, and their recommendation that children be seen and youth be heard in court. They also met with Chief Justice Lewis and toured the Supreme Court. Youth SHINE also conferred with their bill’s sponsors. Representative Will Weatherford is the sponsor of the “Records Bill,” ensuring that youth exiting foster care are provided with all their records, and Representative Kurt Kelly is the “Education Bill” sponsor, to ensure that the transfer of records does not keep youth from enrolling in school. These two bills have the potential to improve the lives of foster children all over the state of Florida.

On Tuesday, Youth SHINE members attended Children’s Week events, including testifying at Senate Judiciary Committee meetings and the Senate Children and Families Committee meeting. At the end of the day, Youth SHINE members had dinner with Secretary Butterworth and Assistant Secretary George Sheldon in Tallahassee.

Wednesday, the last day of the event, members attended more sessions at the Capitol and attended a meeting with the Regional Directors of Children’s Legal Services (CLS). Youth SHINE members meet with leaders in order to remind them that Youth SHINE represents the faces of the children the leaders are sworn to protect. During this lunch, members of Youth SHINE presented posters of their postcard project to remind the people involved with serving youth what their mission is—to protect children.

In fact, Mary Cagle, Director of Children’s Legal Services said, “There was nothing more important in our day of planning the future of Children’s Legal Services than hearing from the young adults who have personally lived the foster care system. Their willingness to share their experiences shows their
commitment to the children who are currently entering the system. I am personally so thankful that they came and shared their personal stories with the lawyers. We were moved by the discussion and motivated to advocate more effectively for children. I can’t thank Andrea Moore enough for making the dialogue between the young adults and the lawyers happen. It was essential, and we will continue talking with each other with the goal of changing the face of foster care for children.”

In addition to this action-packed week, members of Youth SHINE found time to volunteer to help set-up and prepare for Children’s Week events!

It may have only been five days that these young adults were in Tallahassee on Capitol Hill, but their donation of time, their stories, and their hard work will improve the lives of others who are in foster care. Thank you, Florida Youth SHINE!

Florida Youth SHINE is a project of Florida’s Children First.

For more information on Independent Living Services, please visit the Independent Living website at: http://www.state.fl.us/cf_web/

For more information on Youth Shine, Independent Living, or to order more “Rights and Expectations for Children and Youth in Shelter or Foster Care” brochures, please contact Catherine Heath at (850) 922-2425, or by e-mail at: Catherine_Heath@dcf.state.fl.us

Regional Training Events

The one day regional workshops (June 2nd in Tallahassee; June 4th in Orlando and June 6th in Miami) will feature an opening plenary for all participants to be updated on the many changes to Chapter 39, as well as an overview of other children's issues passed at the conclusion of this legislative session.

Children’s Legal Services Super Trainers

In conjunction with the regional trainings, Children’s Legal Services will convene managing attorneys and other administrative staff to develop implementation guides. The plan is to establish teams of “Super Trainers” within the CLS manpower to provide training to investigators and family services workers in the regions and circuits.

Annual Chapter 39 Book

The Department collaborates with the State Courts Administrators Office and Guardian Ad Litem Program to develop and distribute this product to judges, magistrates, lawyers, advocates, investigators and family services workers. Over 5,000 books are produced.
SAFETY PLANS?  WHAT are they...WHO does them...and WHEN?

By Linda D. Johns, MSW, Office of Family Safety

Release 2a of the Florida Safe Families Network provides an electronic format for creating three linked and related pieces of work critical to assuring safety for children:

- Safety Plan
- Out of Home Plan
- Visitation Plan

**Question: What is a Safety Plan and who is responsible for completing it...the child protective investigator or the case manager?**

**Answer:** Both case managers and child protective investigators are required by Florida Administrative Code to develop a Safety Plan to ensure the safety of a child when threats of serious harm are identified. Multiple references are found in both the protective investigations and case management chapters of the administrative code regarding circumstances in which a Safety Plan must be developed and implemented by the CPI, the case manager, or both, and the family, working collaboratively.

- Safety Plans are not a new requirement. FSFN has simply provided us an electronic format for documenting them in our new electronic system of record.

- The Safety Plan functionality in Release 2a provides staff the ability to electronically create, save and generate a Safety Plan document in the system by responding to specific questions (via radio buttons and text fields) that will populate into a Safety Plan template. The template can then be printed and signed by the Safety Plan participants.

- The Out of Home Plan is an extension of the Safety Plan and assists in making and documenting an appropriate placement when the Safety Plan requires the removal of the child.

- The Visitation Plan assures safe and timely contacts between the separated child and family. The three plans are clearly linked in FSFN.

- The Visitation Plan will become a part of the Case Plan.

- The requirements for child protective investigators and case managers to develop and document Safety Plans became effective May 4, 2006 with the provisions found in current Florida Administrative Code.

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**The Safety Plan is defined in Chapter 65C-30.001 (123) as follows:**

“Safety Plan” means the specific course of action that is determined necessary to control threats of serious harm or supplementing a family’s protective capacities implemented immediately when a family’s protective capacities are not sufficient to manage immediate or serious harm threats. The safety plan is jointly developed by a CPI and/or a services worker and the family. The plan may include, but is not limited to, interventions aimed at reducing the serious threat of harm or sign of present danger, decreasing the child vulnerability and/or strengthening the family’s protective capacities. The safety plan shall:

(a) be agreed upon by the child’s parent or other legal custodian and the CPI or services worker,

(b) be signed by the parents or other legal custodian and the CPI or services worker,

(c) contain specific tasks to be performed by the family or caretaker of the child and the CPI or services worker,

(d) be documented in the investigative and case files, and

(e) address both immediate and long-term protection planning.

**Specific references in Florida Administrative Code regarding the need for a Safety Plan**


- Chapter 65C-29.003 (6) and (7) – requirement and responsibility of child protective investigators to develop a Safety Plan during investigations; specific guidance provided including the requirement that the Safety Plan be documented in the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS).

- Chapter 65C-29.004(5) (c)-(h) – requirement for a Safety Plan in an institutional investigation.
Chapter 65C-30.007(3)(b) and (5)(a) – case management supervision requirements.

The newly promulgated out-of-home care foster home licensing chapter also includes a Safety Plan. Chapter 65C-13.004 (11)(c)(2) establishes a Safety Plan for specific supervision in a foster home if the home is located on a busy street.

Key Points

- Who develops the Safety Plan depends on the point in the life of the case (investigations or case management supervision) at which the need for a Safety Plan is identified. In some circumstances, collaboration between the CPI and the case manager will be necessary.
- Safety Plans are currently required by Florida Administrative Code (effective May 2006), and were a part of Florida case work requirements PRIOR TO the development of FSFN.
- FSFN simply provides an electronic format for creating a Safety Plan and documenting the Safety Plan in the official system of record.
- A Safety Plan is not required unless there is an identified need. Not every case will need a Safety Plan.
- Safety Plans should be updated as the needs change. The safety measures can be strengthened or lessened, as indicated.
- When the Safety Plan requires the removal of the child, an Out of Home Plan to assist placement must be developed and entered into FSFN along with a Visitation Plan that addresses planned contacts between the child, the removal family, and any separated siblings.

A new Out of Home Plan must be done each time a child is moved to a different placement. Because the Out of Home Placement Plan is designed to ensure a safe placement and one that is a “good fit” for the child, a new Out of Home Plan will need to address the child’s needs, including sibling status and other placement considerations, prior to any change to a new placement.

- If the child is removed subsequent to a child protective investigation, the CPI will complete the Out of Home Plan; however, generally speaking, circumstances around the timing and transfer of most cases will likely indicate that the Visitation Plan will be developed by the case manager.
- A removal requires a Safety Plan, an Out of Home Plan and a Visitation Plan documented in FSFN. In a removal, the removal IS the Safety Plan for that child!
- In-Home supervision Safety Plans should include increasing visits, supervision and services to the home!

Who is Responsible for Creating These Three Plans?

If the need for a Safety Plan is identified during the investigative phase of the case, the CPI will logically create the Safety Plan and Out of Home Plan, if a removal occurs.

If the need for a Safety Plan is identified during the case management supervision phase of the case, the case manager will develop the Safety Plan.

If a child protective investigation is opened on an active case management supervision case, clearly the CPI and the case manager must work together to develop a Safety Plan, if one is indicated. If a removal occurs subsequent to the investigation, necessitating an Out of Home Plan and a Visitation Plan, the case manager, having primary management of the case, should take the lead in creating those documents and entering them into FSFN.

Again, this is a collaborative process between investigations and case management and circumstances may vary. While there may be more than one Safety Plan developed during the life of a case, investigations and case management staff must be diligent in not creating “concurrent” Safety Plans that are conflicting, contradictory or confusing.

Several Examples of Safety Plans

A CPI identifies serious threats of harm to a child during an investigation involving domestic violence. To immediately address the threat and assure safety, the CPI develops and implements a Safety Plan. The Safety Plan might include, among other safety actions, one of these options:

- requiring the abuser to leave the family home
- securing a safe place for the abused caregiver and the children

A parent in an in-home supervision case is experiencing medical problems that are negatively impacting her ability to protect her children (diminished protective capacities). The case manager specifically identifies significant concerns regarding marginal supervision of the children. A Safety Plan might include, among other actions:

- securing the assistance of a relative to help with managing the children until the mom is fully recovered
- increased visitation and additional services to the home

A report alleging sexual abuse is received on a family under court ordered in-home supervision. The initial investigation finds indicators that support the allegations and the CPI and the case manager collaborate to develop an appropriate Safety Plan.
Plan. They agree that the case manager, as primary manager on the case, will actually enter the Safety Plan (and Out of Home Plan and Visitation Plan, if the child is removed) into FSFN. Specific actions in the Safety Plan might include:

- removing the child from the home and creating an Out of Home Plan and a Visitation Plan

A child with sexually inappropriate behaviors is placed into a licensed foster home. To protect the children in the home, the child’s case manager and the foster parent develop a Safety Plan that addresses among other safety actions:

- additional requirements for supervision and monitoring
- specific sleeping and other arrangements

Regarding the Safety Plan Located in the Child Safety Assessment

- This functionality allows the CPI to complete an initial Safety Plan but does not reflect the family’s engagement in the development of the Safety Actions. This Safety Plan does not provide the capacity to generate a Safety Plan template/document that can be printed, reviewed and signed by the parties to the Safety Plan as required by Florida Administrative Code.
- The Child Safety Assessment Safety Plan terminates when the CPI closes the investigation.
- The Safety Plan checklist located in the Child Safety Assessment is not intended to take the place of the Safety Plan provided in Release 2a.

Summary

The Safety Plan, Out of Home Plan and Visitation Plan are key documents for assuring child safety, appropriate placement matching and case planning. The Florida Safe Families Network now provides child welfare staff a mechanism for developing and documenting these three plans quickly and easily in the Department’s official system of record. This functionality, available in Release 2a, should prove to be a significant step toward providing staff a more efficient, timely and consistent method of documenting their work.

For further information on FSFN policy issues, please contact Linda Johns at (850) 414-9982, or by e-mail at: Linda_D_Johns@dcf.state.fl.us

Resources

Below are helpful resources for researching statutory and policy requirements in Florida. Remember, our practice and its subsequent documentation in the Florida Safe Families Network must be consistent with statutory and policy requirements in Florida. There is not a separate “FSFN policy” apart from our Florida Statute and Florida Administrative Code.

Florida Statutes:
http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/

Florida Administrative Code:
https://www.flrules.org/Default.aspx

Florida Safe Families Network:
FSFN online tutorials, FAQ’s, and a “How Do I?” Guide are located on the Florida Safe Families Network at: http://fsfn/

Florida Statutes and Administrative Code and additional Florida Safe Families Network resources and information can be found at the Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice located below (click on the FSFN icon on the home page):
http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/Pages/Default.aspx

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