**Brief National Perspective**

The Child Welfare League of America reports about 60% of children in foster care are placed together with some or all of their siblings. Additionally,

- The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse estimates that 65-85% of U.S. foster children come from siblings groups, and studies of siblings in the child welfare system suggest that 60% to 73% of U.S. foster children have siblings who also enter foster care (Hegar, 2005, 718).

- Siblings who entered the foster care system within 30 days of each other had almost 4 times the odds of residing together than children who entered care at different times (Shlonsky et al., 2003, 41).

- Studies show that larger sibling groups are more likely than smaller groups to be placed separately, not only because fewer foster homes are willing to accept large groups of children, but also because large sibling groups are less likely to enter foster care at the same time (Washington, 2007, 431).

- Children in group care [licensed] had twice the odds of being separated, whereas children with siblings in relative care were much less likely to be separated (Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005, 761).

*Source: National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at Hunter College, School of Social Work, April 2008.*

**Capturing Florida’s Performance – Methodology**

The way ‘relationship data’ is captured in FSFN makes for difficult if not altogether impossible analysis of siblings in care, plus there is a significant lack of ‘relationship data’ maintained in the system overall. FSFN is functional as a case management system, because a caseworker can open up a case, review it and get a picture of the child's family, history, etc. However, the techniques that are used to pull large data sets don't always work in this environment.

‘Relationship data’ is specifically tricky because it is multi-directional and every participant should have every relationship entered for every other participant. For example, Johnny has four siblings, therefore, he must be set up as the brother of each of those siblings, and each of those siblings must also be set up with relationships to each of the other siblings. So for five children in the case, one must set up 20 different relationships in FSFN. In practice, this is not done consistently or correctly. We often see Johnny has a relationship with Mary as her brother, but Mary's relationship to Johnny shows up as his mother.

We have talked with Susan Smith at Casey (one of the NGA leads) to see if they had any ideas or strategies on how to resolve this issue. Her response was basically that they have been unable to resolve so far and that most states have similar problems linking siblings to a family.
We do, however, have Quality Assurance (QA) Quarterly Review data that captures data for four standards related to sibling groups that provide a view of statewide performance for three consecutive quarters. The standards and findings follow.

**Child Protective Investigations**

**Standard:** If removal involved a sibling group, the siblings were placed together with a relative or non-relative caregiver (not in licensed care) when it was in their best interest. This standard measures CPI performance when CPI made placement decisions, not CBC staff (i.e. placement units).

- Of the 519 investigations reviewed statewide between July 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008, 21 investigations resulted in the CPI removing sibling groups and CPI making placement decisions with relatives.
- Performance is very good overall. In all circuits except one who had removals of sibling groups in the sample, CPI ensured the siblings were placed together. Circuit 19 had three of the 21 applicable investigations, and only achieved less than 70%.

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**Case Management**

In reviewing cases where siblings were living in out of home care, the QA reviewer assesses three standards in each quarterly review.

**Standard:** The child was placed with siblings who were also in licensed and/or non-licensed out of home care.

- Overall the Northeast Region CBCs are doing fairly well in placing siblings together with Partnerships for Strong Families (PSFS) and Clay/Baker as lead performers.
- Big Bend CBC East, Eckerd and Child and Family Connections (CFC) are the areas most in need of improvement as they hover around 40% achievement.
- PFSF attributes their success rate due, at least in part, to monthly “quality meetings” where separated siblings is a standing topic and solutions are found to ensure they are placed together. This supportive team environment addresses accountability issues and provides feedback and recommendations for improved practices that impact positive outcomes.

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**Standard:** If ‘No’ to the above standard, there was clear evidence that separation was necessary to meet the child’s needs.

- Whereas CFC did not show stellar performance in placing siblings together, they clearly documented why separation was necessary in those sibling cases the vast majority of time (over 90%).
• The YMCA, who also did not do well in placing siblings together, did not always document why separation was necessary in their sibling groups (only 55% achievement). The YMCA reports that they continue to recruit homes to accept sibling groups and that they are tracking separated-sibling cases on an ongoing basis, continually working on solutions.

• Clay/Baker did well in both placing siblings together, and when they couldn’t place them together, Clay/Baker documented why separation was necessary over 90% of the time.

• Big Bend CBC East documented why separation was necessary around 60% of the time tying with St. Johns County. The YMCA and CBC Seminole showed lowest performance at 55% and 50% respectively.

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**Standard:** Concerted efforts were made to ensure visitation (or other forms of contact if visitation was not possible) between the child and his or her siblings and it was of sufficient frequency to maintain or promote the continuity of the relationship.

• Clay/Baker stands out again by ensuring siblings are able to visit and visits are frequent. Their data show approximately 95% achievement in this area.

• Performance ranged from a high of 95% achieved by Clay/Baker to a low of 40% achieved by Big Bend CBC East.

• Others who achieved 80% or slightly higher, include CBC Brevard, CBC Seminole, United for Families, and Big Bend CBC West

See Power Point Slide #4
Quality Assurance Findings: Sibling Placements

Child Placed with Siblings (statewide)

- Yes: 55%
- No: 45%

715 applicable case

28.0 The child was placed with siblings who were also in licensed and/or non-licensed out-of-home care.
(applicable to out-of-home care cases)

Child Placed with Siblings by Agency

Source: Results are from a sample of 1400 cases (across 19 CBCs) reviewed during Q1-Q3 FY 2008-2009
Date: 4/22/2009
Quality Assurance Findings: Sibling Placements

If Child is Separated from Siblings, There is a Documented Reason - Statewide

- Yes: 73%
- No: 27%

330 applicable cases

If No was entered for #28, there was clear evidence separation was necessary to meet the child’s needs. (applicable to out-of-home care cases)

If Child Separated from Siblings, There is a Documented Reason by Agency

Source: Results are from a sample of 1400 cases (across 19 CBCs) reviewed during Q1-Q3 FY 2008-2009
Date: 4/22/2009
31.0 Concerted efforts were made to ensure visitation (or other forms of contact if visitation was not possible) between the child and his or her siblings and it was of sufficient frequency to maintain or promote the continuity of the relationship.

**Source:** Results are from a sample of 1400 cases (across 19 CBCs) reviewed during Q1-Q3 FY 2008-2009

**Date:** 4/22/2009
Quality Assurance Findings: Placement Upon Removal

Upon Initial Removal, Siblings Placed Together With Relatives
Statewide

Not Achieved 5%
Achieved 95%

2.5 If removal involved a sibling group, the siblings were placed together with a relative or non-relative caregiver (not in licensed care) when it was in their best interest.

There were no Mostly Achieved or Partially Achieved rating for this measure.

Upon Initial Removal, Siblings Placed Together With Relatives by Circuit

Source: Results are from a sample of 519 cases (across 17 Circuits) reviewed during Q1-Q2 FY 2008-2009. They exclude results from Sheriffs’ reviews.
Date: 4/22/2009