

2013 Texas Citizen Review Team Report

Texas Citizen Review Teams

The State must submit a copy of the annual report(s) from the citizen review panels and a copy of the State agency's most recent response(s) to the panels and State and local child protective services agencies, as required by section 106(c)(6) of CAPTA.

Background

There are twelve Citizen Review Teams as established by the Texas Family Code (TFC §261.312). Five of these teams are designated as meeting the requirements of Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Appendix I. This report consists of information concerning the issues addressed only by the five Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) teams. They are located in Edinburg (Region 11), Houston (Region 6 - two teams), Austin (Region 7) and Fort Worth (Region 3). One of the Houston teams focuses on issues concerning disproportionality. These sites represent a mixture of urban and rural communities, and reflect the broad range of issues encountered by Child Protective Services statewide.

Structure

As required, all Citizen Review Team members, including those of the CAPTA Citizen Review Teams, are volunteers who represent a broad spectrum of their communities. The members are nominated locally and approved by the DFPS Commissioner. CPS state office staff provide assistance in the areas of coordination, team development, training and statewide distribution of team reviews and recommendations. Local CPS staff facilitate the exchange of case-specific information, ensure that confidentiality is maintained, perform the required background checks on nominated members, and arrange for meeting space and clerical support.

Reporting Process

To coincide with the federal fiscal year reporting period, this report covers the period from October 2011 to September 2012. Information presented consists of data gathered by the CAPTA Citizens Review Teams. The teams utilize the Citizen Review Team Reporting form, a standardized form that was developed by CPS state office for the teams and modified in December 2012.

Agency Response

Citizen Review Team recommendations are placed on the DFPS Web site after approval of each Annual Program and Services Report. In addition to the recommendations from the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) teams, it is anticipated that the recommendations and concerns expressed by other, non-CAPTA teams will be published on the website in the next fiscal year. The Web page for recommendations contains a Citizen Review Team specific mailbox that the public can use to comment on the recommendations. That Web page is: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/CRT/.

State office program staff review Citizen Review Team recommendations and those recommendations are considered in policy development, training and procedures. The CAPTA teams often present recommendations for local CPS direct delivery staff about actions they would like to see taken on a particular case. These case-specific recommendations are communicated during the Citizen Review Team meeting to the CPS representatives who are present, and are recorded on the standardized reporting form. Actions on case-specific recommendations are handled at the regional level.

Panel Activities

In August 2012, a consultant with the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services met with fourteen coordinators of Texas Citizen Review Teams. Two of the coordinators are currently in the process of rebuilding their teams. Their teams have not been active and were not counted in the total number of teams. The group discussed the history of the Citizen Review Teams and also the findings from a survey of the Citizen Review Team members, completed by the resource center. During initial consultations and the onsite visit, one of the most significant challenges identified was that although CPS was providing the Citizen Review Teams individual, anecdotal case data, teams were being asked to make broad, systemic recommendations. Each of the teams was identifying cases at random and therefore the sample size for the anecdotal reviews was extremely small. Given the size and diversity of Texas, the teams did not have enough information to determine systemic issues and/or develop effective recommendations. As such, the department was having a difficult time responding to or implementing many of the recommendations, as they were based on limited data, often limited to a specific case and not supported by systemic data, not specific, or generally not actionable.

During the site visit, a new process was developed in order to enhance the Texas Citizen Review Teams. More specifically, technical assistance from the resource center assisted the participants in determining that a better process would be to identify a critical systemic issue that all teams would focus on and that CPS state office personnel would provide data beyond case data. This would provide teams with a wide range of data from which to build their recommendations.

For fiscal year 2013 the Citizen Review Teams are focusing on child welfare cases that involve domestic violence and improving policy, practice and outcomes for such cases. Teams are being provided state and regional quantitative data comparing domestic violence cases that had reentry from those that did not in order to identify trends by age, ethnicity, income, and other variables. Teams are provided current domestic violence policies and will be assisting in the development of new domestic violence policies. Teams are encouraged to engage in additional activities in order to make their recommendations including, but not limited to: community focus groups to assess domestic violence dynamics/services, interviews with domestic violence survivors, and reviews of other best practice materials. It is anticipated that this change in practice while result in broader recommendations from the teams.

Due to this transition in practice, during the current 2013 fiscal year, two of the CAPTA teams met quarterly in compliance with the requirements. The other teams were unable to meet quarterly, but anticipate meeting this requirement in the next federal fiscal year.

The coordinators are CPS staff assigned to this project. The Citizen Review Team coordinators work to establish local and statewide strategic planning, frequent and regular meetings of active teams, and formation of new teams. The Citizen Review Team coordinators meet regularly with state office program staff to discuss better ways to engage the community in the review process. A Citizen Review Team coordinator's manual has been developed and is available as a resource for each team.

The five CAPTA Citizen Review Teams met as follows from October 2011 through September 2012:

- Region 3 (Fort Worth/Tarrant County): October 18, 2011; April 23, 2012; and June 19, 2012. Region 06 (Houston/Harris County): October 9, 2011; May 23, 2012, and September 19, 2012.
- Region 6 (Houston/Disproportionality): This team meets monthly. October 12, 2011, November 9, 2011, January 11, 2012, February 8, 2012, March 14, 2012, April 11, 2012, June 13, 2012, July 11, 2012, August 8, 2012, September 29, 2012.
- Region 07 (Austin/Travis County): July 11, 2012 and August 8, 2012.
- Region 11 (Edinburg/Hidalgo County): October 28, 2011, March 9, 2012, April 13, 2012, July 27, 2012, and September 19, 2012

The CAPTA Citizens Review Team coordinators continue to work with their communities to engage and encourage volunteers to become involved in efforts to gain feedback from the public.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the CAPTA Citizen Review Teams that have statewide implications (compared to recommendations aimed at local procedures and issues) are summarized below.

- **Region 3** focused on efforts to inform communities about when and how to report child abuse and neglect. This team also focused on families who have multiple cases where services have been provided and no substantial change has been made by the family.
- **Region 6** focused on the need for more funding for services for families, as well as the need for all staff to attend cultural diversity training and training for caseworkers on working with medically fragile children and children with special health care needs.
- **Region 11** focused on the need for CPS caseworkers to receive training on physical home environment safety issues, such as hazardous materials, proper storage and disposal of chemicals, poison control, and other general protective issues.

CPS Protection Initiatives

The following chart describes CPS responses that relate to the CAPTA Citizen Review Team identified issues. Each initiative reflects CPS efforts to respond to and improve the quality of the services it provides to the children and families of Texas. Other recommendations made by the teams were case specific and referred to regional management.

Region	Issue Addressed	Recommendation	CPS Response
Region 3	<p>The team questioned what training is available in the community regarding reporting child abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The team asked why the CPS continued to provide services to the family after multiple cases had in the past also provided services and no substantial changes had been made by the family.</p>	<p>CPS should ask reporters to make reports immediately on abuse/neglect because once an investigator sees the child the injury may have healed.</p> <p>Making unannounced home visits is best practice as making an appointment alerts the family of the visit.</p> <p>CPS should limit the services they give to the family and see what initiative the parents take on their own.</p>	<p>Community Engagement staff conduct community presentations to educate the public about how to report child abuse or neglect. Ensuring timely reporting is emphasized. Schools and social service providers who are likely to see children are prioritized populations for the trainings, but CPS staff provide training when requested. There is also information about the statutory requirement to report child abuse and neglect within 72 hours and 48 hours for professional reporters on the DFPS website, as well as an online training module available educating the community about reporting child abuse and neglect. County Child Welfare Boards across the state</p>

			<p>distribute informational giveaways with the number to report printed on the item and encourage all Texans to report child abuse and neglect.</p> <p>Many of the parents seen by CPS have experienced long-term trauma and are in substantial crisis when they enter CPS. Given that research shows that it is in children's best interest to safely live with their birth families, the CPS philosophy is to assist birth families in need by linking them to critical services that will address the problems that led to child abuse/neglect. Client motivation is considered throughout the process, but navigating the service infrastructure could be challenging for parents to do in isolation, and would likely lead to worse outcomes for the children. For this reason, CPS makes every reasonable attempt to assist families in being successful and having a safe environment.</p>
Region 6	The team would like to see additional training for caseworkers on working with children with special health care needs.	The team would like training developed for investigative staff on how to handle reports on families with medically fragile children. A tip sheet should be developed for investigation workers to use when they are assigned an	In January 2012, CPS published policy targeted specifically toward working with children with special health care needs.

		investigation involving a medically fragile child.	
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<p>Region 6</p>	<p>Due to the limitations of the agency's finances, many families do not receive the intensive level of services needed to break cycles of violence and abuse.</p>	<p>More funding for resources such as therapy is a need.</p>	<p>CPS is in the process of strengthening relationships with community partners to increase the resources that are available. The goal is to create a community supported child protective system. There has been an interest by numerous foundations that will potentially increase the amount of resources available to CPS for families in need.</p>
<p>Region 6 (Disproportional ity)</p>	<p>The team recognized that training in cultural issues led to better safety decision making.</p>	<p>All staff, not just management, should attend cultural diversity training.</p>	<p>“Knowing Who You Are” training is provided to all new CPS caseworkers during Basic Skills Development Training. It is now a mandatory course for all CPS direct delivery staff. Individuals in DFPS support positions, the community, and external partners are also invited to participate in the “Knowing Who You Are” workshops. Facilitators include staff from the Center for Learning and Organizational Excellence, program staff, and Disproportionality staff.</p> <p>In addition to “Knowing Who You Are”, DFPS offers additional cultural competency courses as part of the Caseworker and Supervisor Certification Process. These courses are offered online and in classroom settings. The courses are taught by the Center for Learning and Organizational Excellence staff and external contractors.</p>

<p>Region 11</p>	<p>The team was concerned that lack of training contributes to CPS caseworkers not recognizing when a child is safe. The team recommended that CPS caseworkers receive training on physical home environment safety issues such as, hazardous materials, proper storage and disposal of chemicals, poison control, and other general protective issues.</p>	<p>CPS should provide education to parents about maintaining a safe home environment.</p>	<p>Child safety remains the priority for Texas as DFPS continues to build and reinforce a family focused, community based approach to working with families. Enhanced Family-Centered Safety Decision Making remains a continuous quality improvement initiative that will help staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better identify when children are safe vs. unsafe; • better understand the family changes that must occur to keep children safe, resulting in improved matching of appropriate services to children and families; • have an improved understanding of safety as it relates to permanency; and • function in a culture that supports family centered values. <p>Training on Enhanced Family Centered Safety Decision Making has been delivered to staff across the state.</p>
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Conclusion

The Citizen Review Teams are an important component of the Texas child welfare system as CPS continues to improve outcomes and services for children, youth and families. Members voluntarily take time to review the cases with care in order to continue to hold CPS to high investigation standards. By considering innovative ways the community can work together with CPS for child protection, members have shown that improvement of the system is needed and possible. The issues identified and recommendations made by the CAPTA Citizen Review Teams are critical to identifying opportunities for statewide improvements in CPS policy, practice and training.

