

2011 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 17 Citizen Review Teams as established by the Texas Family Code (TFC §261.312). Four 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 four Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) teams. All four teams were incorporated as CAPTA teams as of June 1, 1999. They are located in Edinburg (Region 11), Houston (Region 06), Austin (Region 07) and Fort Worth (Region 03). 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, CAPTA Citizens Review Team members 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 2010 to September 2011. 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, implemented in April 2000, and modified to be more user-friendly in May 2009.

Agency Response

Citizen Review Team recommendations are placed on the DFPS Web site after the 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

During the 2011 fiscal year, the Citizen Review Team/Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) teams made significant efforts to meet regularly. Three of the CAPTA teams were able to meet quarterly in compliance with the requirements of the CAPTA. The Tarrant County CAPTA team was unable to meet quarterly, but anticipates meeting this requirement in the next federal fiscal year.

The coordinators are CPS staff assigned to this project. In addition to acting as Citizen Review Team coordinators, their other duties are CPS supervisors, Program Directors, Program Administrators, Risk Managers, or Program Specialists. 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.

One new Citizen Review Team is being developed in Region 03 (Denton). This team will focus on disproportionality issues and will be the third Disproportionality team in Texas. The other two Disproportionality teams are in Region 03 (Dallas) and Region 06 (Houston).

The four CAPTA Citizen Review Teams met as follows from October 2010 through September 2011:

- Region 03 (Fort Worth/Tarrant County): October 4, 2010; January 20, 2011; and April 27, 2011.
- Region 06 (Houston): November 30, 2010; February 17, 2011; May 11, 2011; and August 10, 2011.
- Region 07 (Austin/Travis County): November 30, 2010; July 14, 2011; August 29, 2011; and September 29, 2011.
- Region 11 (Edinburg): January 21, 2011; February 18, 2011; March 8, 2011; April 11, 2011; and June 24, 2011.

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 2011 findings of the CAPTA Citizen Review Teams that have statewide implications (compared to recommendations aimed at local procedures and issues) are summarized below.

Region 03 focused on the need for additional funding for drug testing of parents and caseworker training regarding drug testing, the effect of staff turnover, and the negative impact to families when their cases go through multiple stages of service and multiple caseworkers.

Region 06 focused on a lack of communication between CPS caseworkers and medical providers for children with special medical needs and the need for caseworkers to have additional training regarding child vulnerability, safety factors, and case documentation.

Region 07 focused on several training issues. These included the need to train all staff (not just management) on issues of cultural diversity and assessment of when a family should receive services.

Region 11 focused on the need to educate parents during their first interaction with CPS so that further intervention is not needed and on the need to provide training to the legal community regarding issues of abuse and neglect.

CPS Protection Initiatives

The following chart describes CPS actions 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.

Region	Issue Addressed	Recommendation	CPS Initiative
Region 03	The team was concerned that there is often a significant delay between a caseworker asking a parent to submit to a drug test and the parent actually submitting to the test. They felt this allowed a parent who is abusing substances to have a negative result. They were also concerned that the oral swabs used by caseworkers in the field were not effective and would not be admissible in court.	The team recommended additional funding and resources for drug testing. The team also recommended that CPS should not determine a case disposition solely on the results of a drug test.	The types of drug tests funded are oral fluid tests (both with and without confirmation), urine analysis, and hair follicle tests with a detection window of 90 days for drug use by a client. Training on how to use the tests or when to use the tests is ongoing and specific to the type of drug tests. Most caseworkers receive training on oral swabs from the vendor. An excellent description of each test with advantages and disadvantages is accessible to all caseworkers on a substance abuse intranet site designed specifically for educational purposes.

Region	Issue Addressed	Recommendation	CPS Initiative
			<p>Caseworkers, with guidance from their supervisors, determine the disposition of an allegation of abuse or neglect based on all of the information gathered during an investigation.</p>
Region 03	<p>The team discussed high caseloads, high turnover, and their concern about CPS caseworkers who resign leaving investigations that are not completed. They were also concerned about the possibility of high workloads contributing to CPS caseworkers falsifying case documentation in order to close a case.</p>	<p>The team's recommendations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those caseworkers incur a financial penalty if they leave DFPS without completing their casework. • That CPS management needs to find incentives to encourage caseworkers to complete their cases prior to leaving the agency. • That DFPS establish units that only handle cases that need to be reassigned. • That supervisors receive training on retention of staff. 	<p>CPS supervisors receive training on staff retention during their certification process. The agency has an extensive Recruitment and Retention Initiative that provides services and resources to counties with recruitment and/or retention issues.</p>
Region 06	<p>The team would like to see additional training for</p>	<p>The team would like training developed for</p>	<p>In January 2012, CPS published policy targeted specifically toward</p>

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	caseworkers on working with children with special health care needs.	<p>investigative staff on how to handle reports on families with medically fragile children.</p> <p>They suggested the development of a tip sheet for investigation workers to use when they are assigned an investigation involving a medically fragile child.</p>	working with children with special healthcare needs.
Region 06	The team was concerned that the lack of training contributes to CPS caseworkers not recognizing when a child is safe.	Staff should be trained on recognizing when a child is vulnerable to safety issues in their living environment.	<p>Child safety remains the priority for Texas as DFPS continues to build and reinforce a family focused, community based approach to providing services. 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

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			<p>values.</p> <p>Through a grant funding by the Children’s Justice Act, training on enhanced family centered safety decision making has been delivered to staff across the state.</p>
Region 07	<p>The team was concerned that a failure to review case history prevented CPS from taking legal action on a case in a timely manner.</p>	<p>The team recommended that staff should review complex cases with a Child Safety Specialist or Risk Manager early in the case.</p>	<p>For cases that meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a child under the age of four in the home; • there have three or more referrals to CPS within the past 12 months; and • the case is not open in another stage of serve; <p>it is automatically flagged as needing a consultation with a Child Safety Specialist. This consult must occur within 10 days. The Child Safety Specialist will conduct a full review of the case history and make recommendations to the caseworker for any further action needed to ensure child safety.</p> <p>A CPS caseworker or supervisor can request a case consultation with a Child Safety Specialist at any time during any investigation.</p>

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Region 07	The team recognized that training in cultural issues led to better safety decision making.	The team recommended that all staff, not just management, should attend cultural diversity training.	<p>Knowing Who You Are training is provided to all new CPS caseworkers during Basic Skills Development Training. It is 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 Organizational Excellence, program staff, and regional Disproportionality Specialists.</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>
Region 11	The team was concerned about the high recidivism rate among families involved with CPS.	CPS should provide education to parents after their first involvement with CPS in order to prevent future reports. CPS caseworkers need to have a clear understanding of the family's history prior to beginning their investigation.	CPS caseworkers are trained in reviewing case history during Basic Skills Development. Additionally, caseworkers are knowledgeable about resources in their communities and provide the family referrals to these resources to meet their needs.

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Region 11	The team discussed that the legal community should have more education regarding abuse and neglect and that CPS should be able to take action before a child is injured, and not after.	Legal community should have better training on abuse/neglect	CPS state office staff frequently offers and participates in training with the legal community across the state.

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, 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.