

Special Committee on Permanency for Young Children in the Child Welfare System
June 27th, 2012

Wisconsin County Human Services Association (WCHSA) members present: Vicki Tylka, Marathon County, Ray Przybelski, Portage County and Mark Mertens, Outagamie County

Introduction and Background

Importance of studying the issue of permanence

Through the eyes of a child

Importance of timely reunification, birth family connections, and time needed to make that happen. Balance between permanence and time needed.

Commonalities and differences between counties in delivering services in child welfare

- Counties have a significant investment in child welfare, both financially and for the success of children
- Children and families are seen as our greatest resource
- Review current timelines under the law (15 out of 22 months in placement to file a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition)
- All counties operate under the same laws and standards, although there are differences in resources and services from county to county

Rural issues

- Availability of resources for specialized services, transportation
- Access to specialized legal services, lack of court time, psychological evaluations, staff retention

Families and children have more complicated issues:

- Alcohol and Drug dependence, mental health issues
- Trauma
- Timeframes to receive services is an issue in some counties/regions
- Services are more involved and complicated
- Specialized/high risk adoption issues and disruption concerns

Permanence measurements through the Quality Service Review

- Marathon County's experience
- Concurrent planning-system issues
- Use of relative placements
- Length of time in care

What can be done to improve permanency outcomes?

1. Current efforts

- Permanency roundtables
- Subsidized Guardianship
- Medical homes
- Revised Focus and statutory changes:
 - Concurrent planning and trial reunification
- Relative search for placement options
- County Data Leadership pilots

2. Other potential focus areas

- Facilitated discussions regarding community perspective and attitude on permanence
 - Include county staff, providers, courts, attorneys, parents
- Evaluate system issues for delays once TPR is filed
- Evaluate system issues for delays once TPR is finalized to completion of adoption

Conclusion:

Permanence for children is of paramount concern to counties who have the honor of providing child welfare services throughout the State.

WCHSA believes current statutory timelines for filing a TPR petition should remain in place because families need adequate time to engage in vital services which can address their complex issues that have led them to the child welfare system. We believe that system change can be positively affected through the initiatives recently implemented by the Department of Children and Families and counties. We expect to see permanence outcomes improve.

We believe that there could be opportunities for system changes, after the TPR petition is filed. Court processes and timelines for the transition from county to the state for final adoption status should be evaluated for efficiencies and mainstreamed procedures.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee on such an important issue in the lives of the children we serve.