



**South Carolina
Citizen Review Panel
2019 Annual Report**



MISSION

Engaging citizens to improve outcomes for SC's children and families affected by child abuse and neglect.

VISION

That all of South Carolina's children and families are free from child abuse and neglect.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel would like to express their appreciation to the following individuals and organizations for their support of the panel's work during the past year:

Organizations that Provided Meeting Space:

- Abbeville and Greenwood County First Steps
- Child's Haven
- Dorchester County First Steps
- Richland County Public Library
- Gunter's Chapel Baptist Church

South Carolina Department of Social Services:

- Michael Leach, State Director
- Karen Bryant, Deputy State Director
- Faith Lee, Accountability and Performance Director
- Sharleta Woodall, Statewide Kinship Care Manager

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE CHAIR

Dear Reader:

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), requires Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) to examine the policies, procedures, and practices of the child protective services system with the intent of gauging the effectiveness of child protective services. South Carolina has CRPs which are located in the Lowcountry, Midlands and Upstate. The panel members work in collaboration with child welfare stakeholders to research and evaluate topics that have influence on the programs administered to our children and families.

South Carolina CRP members serve under the premise that it will take a collaborative effort to build awareness around the work of the panels and to connect with other advocacy and child welfare service organizations to address concerns and promote well-structured service practices of the state's child-welfare agency. The year 2019 was a year of strong progress in the areas of public awareness and agency collaboration. The events of the year included changes in the administrative staff of SC Department of Social Services, which provided an opportunity for growth and improvement in the services to the children and families of South Carolina. SC CRP's focus continuous to be on transforming our child welfare agency into the model service provider in the United States.

This annual report will present a summary of the works of our review panels and the areas of focus addressed by each. The panels sought measures on addressing domestic violence in relations to service children and families, kinship care resources and public awareness, and the treatment planning process. In the spirit of collaboration, the panels used the resources of the Children's Law Center, Department of Social Services Administration and other community service organizations to gain knowledge on the chosen topics to provide informed recommendations for improved services in these areas. Working with these entities proved to be advantageous in noting the challenges and strengths in the policies and practices of SCDSS.

It is the desire of the Panel that the work of its members aids in the continuous efforts to enhance the practices in service to our children and families in South Carolina. We are appreciative of the SC CRP members, Kayla Mallett, former SC CRP State Coordinator, and the SC Children's Law Center administrators.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kim Janha

Kim Janha, Ph.D.
Executive Chair

ABOUT THE PANEL

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are federally mandated mechanisms for citizen participation in child protection, through evaluation and public outreach. Each state is required to have at least one CRP, and most are required to have more based on their federal funding level. In South Carolina, there are three panels located in different geographic areas of the state. The Upstate Panel alternates meeting in Greenwood and Greenville counties; the Midlands Panel meets in Richland County; and the Lowcountry Panel meets in Charleston or Dorchester County. Panels review policies, procedures, and practices of the child protection system and make recommendations annually to the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS). These recommendations are intended to improve the child protection system and make a difference in the lives of children who are abused or neglected. SCDSS responds to the CRP's report as to whether and how the recommendations will be implemented. Citizen Review Panels offer volunteers an effective way to share in the community's responsibility to protect the children of South Carolina.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

Citizen Review Panels were established through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Reauthorization of 1996 and amendments were enacted in the 2003 and 2010 reauthorizations. Under CAPTA, the state child protection agency must establish at least the required number of panels in the state, provide information on cases as determined to be necessary, arrange for staff assistance to the panel in the performance of its duties, and respond to the panel's recommendations.

CAPTA also outlines the duties of the panel. Each Citizen Review Panel is charged with evaluating the extent to which the State is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with its CAPTA State plan by: (1) examining the policies, procedures and practices of state and local child protection agencies, and (2) reviewing specific cases, where appropriate. In addition, a panel may examine other criteria that it considers important to ensure the protection of children, including the extent to which the State and local child protection system is coordinated with the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Programs of the Social Security Act. This provision also authorizes panels to review the child fatalities and near fatalities in the state. Panels must meet at least quarterly to accomplish these duties.

In order to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community and fulfill the above requirements, citizen review panels must provide for public outreach and comment. Finally, each state panel must prepare an annual report that summarizes its activities and makes recommendations to improve the child protection system at the state and local levels. The report must be submitted to the child protection agency and the public.

Reference: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended, 42 U.S.C. §5106a(c).

FUNCTIONS OF THE PANEL

The primary purpose of the Citizen Review Panels is to assist state and local child protection systems to be more responsive to community needs and opportunities in providing child protection services through evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy. The South Carolina Panel:

1. **Evaluates** the extent to which SC DSS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities.
2. **Conducts public outreach** and gathers public comment on current SC DSS procedures and practices involving child protection services.
3. **Advocates** for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in South Carolina.

SOUTH CAROLINA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Panels are comprised of volunteer members who are representative of the community and include members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. CAPTA requires that members maintain confidentiality by not disclosing any identifying information regarding child protection cases. In South Carolina, the panels are self-perpetuating with new members elected by current members. Each panel elects its chairperson and the chairpersons of the regional panels elect a statewide executive chair.

Members during the previous year are listed below:

LOW COUNTRY

1. Donna Xenakis (Chair) – Owner & CEO, Now Hear This
2. Tomeika Martin
3. LuShorn Smalls

MIDLANDS

1. Kimberly Janha (Chair) – Legislative Coordinator, Richland Legislative Delegation, former foster parent, kinship caregiver
2. Kay Powers
3. Nina Spinelli
4. Chris Whitaker
5. Brooke Wymer

UPSTATE

1. Angela Pruitt (Chair) – Executive Director, Abbeville County First Steps
2. Sharon Britz
3. Tanya Camunas
4. Chloe Evans
5. Michael Gaskin
6. Allie Elizabeth Howell
7. Linda Klemm-Maxie

8. Kimberly McIntyre
9. Sabrina Miller
10. Betsy Manning
11. Loretta Parker
12. Rosella Quarles
13. Paulette Randall
14. Carolyn Robinson
15. Vallery Smith
16. Danny Varat

STAFF SUPPORT

The South Carolina Department of Social Services provides funding for staff support and administrative expenses through a contract with the Children’s Law Center at the University of South Carolina School of Law. The Panels function independently, with staff and research support to assist in the performance of their duties.

The Children’s Law Center employs a part-time staff person to assist the panels. Kayla Mallett served as Coordinator from February 2018 until February 2020. The position is now vacant, but will be filled in the near future.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The South Carolina Citizen Review Panel maintained three regional panels in the Upstate, Midlands, and Lowcountry from May 2019 through April 2020. Panels met throughout the year to review policies and practices and discuss issues affecting the child welfare system in the state. Each panel focused on different topics. The Upstate panel addressed treatment plans, particularly parental involvement in their development. The Midlands Panel continued to focus on kinship care and supported kinship circles in Richland County. The Lowcountry Panel continued its review of the interface of domestic violence and child protection cases.

The Executive Committee (comprised of the panel chairpersons) met regularly with representatives of the South Carolina Department of Social Services. During these meetings, panel chairs asked questions or discussed concerns and SCDSS provided agency updates. Specifically, SCDSS regularly presented information on the Michelle H. lawsuit, the Child and Family Services Review, and the agency's priorities and plans.

Panel members came together for their fall retreat in October 2019. This event is held annually to provide an opportunity for panel members from across the state to interact and to receive information on selected child welfare issues. At the 2019 event, panel members enjoyed interacting with Michael Leach, SCDSS State Director, and Karen Bryant, SCDSS Deputy State Director for Child Welfare Services.

Mr. Leach and Ms. Bryant shared their vision for child welfare services in South Carolina and responded to questions from the Panel. Panel members also began discussing plans to strengthen new member recruitment and onboarding to ensure a more standardized method of panel development across the state and a diverse representation on each of the individual panels. The Panel also decided to add a second annual event to jump start the panel year, create a sense of shared purpose across the three panels, and receive valuable information and updates relevant to the panel work. Members at the retreat discussed the need to draft a standard timeline for the panel's annual work, taking into consideration issue selection, volunteer recruitment, information gathering, outreach, and other components of the Panel's yearly work. Finally, the Panel discussed the need to develop a process for documenting anecdotal community feedback on relevant issues to enhance its role as a channel for citizen input.

Several panel members attended the National Citizens Review Panel Conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico June 6-8, 2019. The annual national citizen review panel conference brings together a diverse group of stakeholders from throughout the country to discuss their roles and learn about child welfare best practices.

PANEL CHAIR REPORTS

LOW COUNTRY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

During 2019, the Lowcountry CRP met monthly from February to September and addressed the topics of child abuse awareness and prevention and domestic violence.

Child Abuse Awareness & Prevention Training: The Lowcountry Citizen Review Panel remains concerned about child abuse and neglect and child fatalities in South Carolina. In order to be pro-active about this serious issue and to educate the public about child abuse and neglect and about the work of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel, we offered a free Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training on April 6, 2019 in Horry County. Information about the volunteer work of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel was shared at this meeting. It is our belief and hope that with more adults educated about this issue and how to respond when child abuse or neglect is disclosed or suspected, children will be safer. We plan to continue this work in 2020.

The Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training is registered with SCDSS Child Care Training System for 2.0 Professional Development contact hours. This training is provided by Donna Xenakis, Chair of the Lowcountry Panel and CEO of Now Hear This.

Children cannot be expected to protect themselves from child abuse. It is the responsibility of adults to be trained in child abuse awareness and prevention. Children are safer when adults are educated in the signs of child abuse and neglect, and how to react to them.

In this comprehensive training, participants learned: the four types of child abuse, why child abuse occurs, who gets abused, and who the alleged perpetrators are, the impact of child abuse on the child, their family, and on society, what South Carolina law states about child abuse, what South Carolina law states about spanking children, the clues that children give us when they are being abused, the probable actions of the alleged perpetrator, according to South Carolina law, who “Mandatory Reporters” are, and their responsibilities about reporting, what to do if you suspect a child is being abused, how to handle a disclosure of child abuse, and what to document, what a “Minimal Facts Interview” is, why it is so important, and how to conduct one, what “Reason to Believe” is, when SC Law requires a report to be made and which agency to contact to make a report.

Attendees included: parents, community volunteers and staff from local organizations.

On a scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (excellent), 15 attendees rated the training as excellent, and 3 attendees rated the training as very good. Comments include:

“This training was very informative. As a future teacher I am glad I know about how to protect my students and help them.” ~Anonymous

"I really enjoyed this training. It was great, and I learned a lot of information. ~ Anonymous

"This training was very informative." ~ Anonymous

"I really enjoyed the training and all the information provided." ~ Anonymous

"Excellent training, very informative and interesting." ~ Anonymous

Domestic Violence: The Lowcountry Citizen Review Panel began project work in 2016 to look at how domestic violence affects children and the non-offending/victim parents in South Carolina. Over this three-year period, we have made recommendations that we believe can change the way that non-offending/victim parents, their children, and domestic violence as a whole is viewed in South Carolina.

On January 17, 2019 Donna Xenakis, Lowcountry Chair, and Kim Janha, Midlands Chair, met with Valerie Ekue from South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to explore ways the Panel can access feedback from DSS domestic violence liaisons statewide.

In August 2019, Donna Xenakis, Low Country Chair, met with Lois Richter, Beaufort County DSS Director, to discuss the letters she wrote for the non-offending/victim parents in Beaufort County to explain services to clients. The letters are included in Appendix 1. Ms. Richter explained the purpose of these letters in the following note.

A note from Lois Richter, Director, Beaufort County DSS:

I chose to write two letters for the clients at our domestic violence shelter because not every woman there has a DSS case. However, it was important to us that every client understand what services we can offer regardless of whether or not she had an open case with us. Our services are available for everyone and while many people in the general public believe that "all we do is take people's children," nothing could be farther from the truth. Asking a Family Court judge to remove children from their parents and home is truly the last action we want to take, but we will if the safety and wellbeing of the children is at risk. Our Economic Services Department issues SNAP benefits, assists with employment and helps clients find appropriate housing and these services do not require a Human Services case to be open. For those clients who do have a DSS case, the same services are available, and we work very hard to assist survivors of domestic violence to stand on their own, with their children. We make referrals to counseling and any other services that would benefit the survivor and her children and that is the message we are sending to all clients of domestic violence shelters. We applaud the decision to seek safe shelter and the care and protection of the mother and her children is always our primary concern.

Based on the concerns the Low Country Citizen Review Panel has about domestic violence and the effect it has on children and the non-offending/victim parent, the Lowcountry Panel recommends that SCDSS review the letters from Beaufort County DSS to their non-offending /victim parents to explain their services to clients with a domestic violence case to consider use state-wide. (See letters in Appendix 1.)

In the 2018 Annual Report, the Lowcountry Panel made seven recommendations pertaining to domestic violence with a focus on keeping children safe and together with the non-offending/victim parent. We request an update on any progress made. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by: Donna Xenakis, Chair, Lowcountry Citizen Review Panel

MIDLANDS CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Public Awareness: The Midlands Panel sought to build and sustain a public presence through hosting and participating in community and national events. Kayla Mallet, SC State CRP Coordinator, kept the public aware of child welfare events and other publications through our social media forum, Facebook. Our increased presence provided an avenue to promote CRP's initiatives and collaborative events. Working with other organizations on child welfare related events offered an opportunity to introduce the panel's work to a larger audience.

The Midlands Panel sought to use a public forum in April 2019, Child Abuse Awareness month, focusing on the topic of domestic violence, to increase awareness of the panel and invite members of the community to learn about the panel and its works. Midlands members joined with the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Kinship Care Advisory Council in the planning and execution of the activities for Kinship Care Day at the Capitol. This event was designed to raise awareness of kinship care and to advocate for resources for families. Additionally, members of the Midlands Panel presented strategies around topic review at the National Citizen Review Panel Conference.

Through these events, the Midlands Panel gained knowledge of community resources and the organizations that provide them. The comradery felt from these servants indicated that the community is willing to unite to build a system of effective services to the children and families of South Carolina. The Midlands Panel recommends that SCDSS continue to develop a collaborative relationship with community stakeholders, which can aid in increasing and maintaining a positive image in the community. Continuously, it is recommended that a volunteer program is established to engage the public in efforts to assist youth involved in the child welfare system. Extending the agency into the community is an opportunity to gain the perspective from stakeholders that are not directly served.

Kinship Care: In 2019, the panel agreed that the topic of kinship care was a continued focus of SCDSS and community organizations and would be befitting of continuation of the panel. Members worked with community organizations to advance services and resources to kinship caregivers who participate in Kinship Circles. Members of the panel served with other stakeholders to develop criteria to establish a statewide Kinship Care Advisory Council, facilitated by SCDSS Kinship Care Manager and Kinship Care Regional Coordinators. The Council is composed of kinship caregivers, kinship care navigator organizations, and SCDSS kinship care staff. The purpose of this group is to provide input on policy and practices in reference to service to kinship families.

The Midlands Panel banded with council members and other kinship caregivers to offer a learning session at the South Carolina First Steps' 2019 SC Summit on Early Childhood in December. This panel discussion allowed participants the opportunity to learn of the personal and employment experiences around kinship care and emphasize the importance of a collaborative system to aid caregivers in maintaining a thriving living environment for themselves and their families

The Panel continued its partnership with the Richland County Library System and Gunter's Chapel Baptist Church in hosting Kinship Circles. Members of the circles and their children were gifted by community donors; including legislators, clergy, educators, realtors and other individuals, finances and materials for school supplies, Thanksgiving dinners, and Christmas. The services to kinship caregivers continue to be a heightened issue. The members have expressed excitement around improved practices developed by SCDSS to improve services to kinship caregivers and their families.

Dr. Kim Janha continues to represent the CRP as a member of the Sister of Charity Foundation's Kinship Care Advisory Council. This collaborative group comprised of child welfare advocates maintain their stance as loud voices for increased awareness and support for resources to those who serve as kinship caregivers.

Effective and efficient service to kinship caregivers continues to be a challenge in the child-welfare environment. While strategies are being devised, persistently families are not well-informed around the procedures of becoming a kinship caregiver through SCDSS. Likewise, informal placements of children with kin continue to face challenges with identifying resources needed to create and/or maintain a healthy living environment. The Midlands Panel recommends that SCDSS continues its efforts in training its staff and promoting a culture that provides the highest level of service to these families. It is also recommended that outreach is done beyond the awareness of caregivers, but to the larger community to educate on best practices in servicing kinship caregivers and the children in their care.

Domestic Violence: The Midlands Panel joined the efforts of the Lowcountry Panel in exploring domestic violence and the policies and practices of the child welfare agency in regard to serving families that SCDSS encounters. The Panel received a presentation on domestic violence policy from the Children's Law Center interns and hosted SCDSS liaisons for a round table discussion. The Panel also hosted two Child Abuse Prevention Month events in April, in Columbia and Aiken Counties.

Research and the community forum allowed panel members to identify the lack of specific child-welfare policies around children and families served through a domestic violence circumstance. Additionally, it was gathered that community and state human service organizations and the child welfare agency had little to no relations regarding the service to these families.

The Midlands Panel wishes to reiterate the previous recommendations made by the Lowcountry Panel regarding a stand-alone, child-centered policy on domestic violence, to include measures that will keep children safe and together with the non-offending/victim parent. Additionally, it is recommended that SCDSS collaborate with domestic violence professionals who serve as liaisons to the agency and the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to provide effective and efficient services to families who experience domestic violence.

Respectfully submitted by: Kim Janha, Ph.D., Chair, Midlands Citizen Review Panel

UPSTATE CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

The Upstate Citizens Review Panel partnered with Lighthouse for Life and hosted a forum on Human Trafficking at Tabernacle Baptist Church, “Taking Steps Against Sex Trafficking and Exploitation” on June 26, 2019. This event was open to anyone in the Upstate to attend, receive credit hours, and information.

The Upstate Citizen’s Review Panel reviewed treatment plans with a focus on parental involvement at Greenwood Department of Social Services on June 12, 2019. Angela Pruitt, Kayla Mallett, Carolyn Robinson, Loretta Parker, and Rosella Quarles reviewed treatment plans with Robin Smith, Greenwood DSS Director, and several case workers. However, the treatment plans were all court ordered, and State DSS requested that the Upstate Citizens Review Panel pick another strategy since DSS Statewide is being audited by the Federal Government (the Child and Family Services Review) and this information was already being reviewed. The Upstate Citizens Review Panel agreed to begin looking at the relationship between the Guardian Ad Litem Program and SCDSS.

Based on concerns related to parental involvement in the treatment planning process, the Upstate Citizen Review Panel recommends that SCDSS continue its efforts to improve the treatment planning process, particularly the involvement of families in the development of the plan.

Respectfully submitted by: Angela Pruitt, Chair, Upstate Citizen Review Panel

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That SCDSS review the letters from Beaufort County DSS to their non-offending/victim parents to explain their services to clients with a domestic violence case to consider use statewide. (See Appendix 1)
2. In the 2018 Annual Report, the Lowcountry Panel made seven recommendations pertaining to domestic violence with a focus on keeping children safe and together with the non-offending/victim parent. We request an update on any progress made. Thank you.
3. That SCDSS continues to develop a collaborative relationship with community stakeholders, which can aid in increasing and maintaining a positive image in the community. Continuously, it is recommended that a volunteer program is established to engage the public in efforts to assist youth involved in the child welfare system.
4. That SCDSS continues its efforts in training its staff and promoting a culture that provides the highest level of service to kinship care families. It is also recommended that outreach is done beyond the awareness of caregivers, but to the larger community to educate on best practices in servicing kinship caregivers and the children in their care.
5. That SCDSS establish a stand-alone, child-centered policy on domestic violence, to include measures that will keep children safe and together with the non-offending/victim parent. Additionally, it is recommended that SCDSS collaborate with domestic violence professionals who serve as liaisons to the agency and the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to provide effective and efficient services to families who experience domestic violence.
6. That SCDSS continue its efforts to improve the treatment planning process, with a particular focus on the involvement of families in developing the plan.

LOOKING BACK: PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes a brief summary of the recommendations that the Citizen Review Panel submitted to SCDSS in May 2019. SCDSS' response to each recommendation is noted in italics.

- 1. That DSS secure a child-centered, stand-alone policy on domestic violence, with a focus on keeping children safe and together with the non-offending/victim parent, with broad definitions of the type of domestic violence and the variety of adult relationships, being sensitive to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, education, background, religion, physical and/or mental abilities or physical appearance.**

SCDSS will review their policies, procedures, and practice standards related to domestic violence and where necessary, revise to enhance clarity. DSS policies will continue to be available online and DSS will continue to collaborate with the Lowcountry CRP on this effort.

- 2. That DSS secure domestic violence training through the Safe and Together Institute for all staff and incorporate principles and strategies learned into their policies and procedures.**

SCDSS will examine agencies who provide services to domestic violence survivors and their families. The DSS division of Adult Advocacy oversees grants that support services for families involved with domestic violence. Throughout the state there are various services on a county by county basis that have domestic violence resources for these families.

- 3. Although each case is unique, the CRP believes, in general, that the best place for the child is with the non-offending parent and recommends that when possible children remain in custody of the non-offending parent.**

SCDSS will review their policies, procedures and practice standards related to domestic violence and where necessary, revise to enhance clarity for the field. SCDSS policies will continue to be available online. SCDSS will continue to collaborate with the Low County CRP regarding this effort.

- 4. That DSS help to ensure the offending parent is held accountable by recommending to the courts, when there is a court case involved, that the parent be included in the court-ordered treatment plan.**

SCDSS will review their policies, procedures and practice standards related to domestic violence and where necessary, revise to enhance clarity for the field. SCDSS policies will continue to be available online. SCDSS will continue to collaborate with the Low County CRP regarding this effort.

- 5. That DSS only remove the children from the home when it is absolutely necessary, and that the children are not placed with the offending/perpetrator Parent's family.**

Whether children remain in the custody of the parent who did not perpetrate the CDV will depend on certain factors including the non-offending parent's protective capacity and the best interests of the child as well as the standards set forth in the Children's Code regarding removal of a child (including S.C. Code sections 63-7-1650 and 63-7-1660).

- 6. That, due to the many concerns of Adverse Childhood Experiences, DSS offer support groups, counseling services and/or parent & child therapy to the children and the non-offending/victim parent.**

SCDSS will examine agencies that provide services to domestic violence survivors and their families. DSS has the division of Adult Advocacy who currently oversees grants that support services for families involved with domestic violence. Throughout the state there are various services on a county by county basis that has domestic violence resources for these families.

- 7. That DSS partner with law enforcement to remove non- offending/victim parents from the Central Registry.**

SCDSS will review their policies, procedures and practice standards related to domestic violence and where necessary, revise to enhance clarity for the field. SCDSS policies will continue to be available online. SCDSS will continue to collaborate with the Low County CRP regarding this effort.

- 8. That DSS develop a volunteer program, which can aid in increasing and maintaining a positive image in the community. Additionally, a volunteer program can engage the public in efforts to assist youth involved in the child welfare system. Extending the agency into the community, is an opportunity to gain the perspective from stakeholders that are not directly involved with the system.**

SCDSS agrees with this recommendation and has established a kinship care advisory group to support kinship caregivers. SCDSS has created a kinship care program in the Child Welfare Services division, led by the newly appointed manager to lead the development of a comprehensive kinship care program including, navigator support, kinship foster care, kinship adoption and subsidized kinship guardianship.

- 9. That DSS continue its efforts in training its staff and promoting a culture that provides the highest level of service to kinship care families. It is also recommended that outreach is done beyond the awareness of caregivers, but to the larger community to educate on best practices in servicing kinship caregivers and the children in their care.**

SCDSS will continue to be responsive to requests for information about our programs and services. This team is working a detailed strategic plan to enhance the kinship program that includes development of policies, procedures, and practice standards to support implementation of H. 3701, a bill requiring the department to inform kinship caregivers of the procedures for foster home licensure before placing a child in the caregiver's home.

10. That DSS ensure that families receive a copy of their treatment plans and are aware of what services are offered, so they will have the opportunity to be successful.

Human Services Policy, Chapter 5, Foster Care & Permanency Planning, Section 510.4 mandates case managers shall provide the parent with a copy of the proposed plan and explain its provisions. Immediately after the court approves the initial case plan, the Foster Care/IFCCS Worker shall provide a copy to the parent/guardian and shall reiterate that failure to remedy the conditions that caused the removal within six months may result in termination of parental rights.

11. Upon the results of the treatment plan review, ensure all DSS staff members and supervisors are involved in the treatment planning process.

Human Services Policy, Chapter 5, Foster Care & Permanency Planning, Section 510.4 mandates the case managers shall review the status of the case plan on a monthly basis and shall update the plan at any time if the need for a change is identified. The results of the progress review shall be documented in the child's case plan and in CAPSS dictation. The case planning meeting shall include the family, the child (if appropriate or in all cases if the child is 14 or older), and, if the child is 14 or older, any support persons identified by the child and not rejected by the agency (see above for procedures related to involvement of child/support persons). The meeting shall be a comprehensive review of the case plan and the monthly monitoring of case activities, and shall include the following topics, if applicable:

- *whether the child's placement in foster care remains necessary and appropriate;*
- *the child's safety in the placement;*
- *the child's permanency plan status (at least every 6 months);*
- *sibling connections (see Section 510.5);*
- *any reduced safety threats in the home (when reunification is the plan);*
- *changes in behavior that have occurred in the family members over time that are needed to create a safe environment for the child and identification of the required changes that have not been demonstrated at the time of the evaluation (when reunification is the plan);*
- *observable behaviors of the child in foster care when behaviors are resulting in disruptions in placement or educational stability;*
- *any child involvement with the juvenile justice system (see Section 550.2);*
- *effectiveness of current services;*
- *current actions to locate absent parents, relatives, or fictive kin (see Section 510.3);*
- *the child's transition to adulthood, beginning no later than age 14.*

12. Upon the results of the review, to ensure the quality assurance process will improve and the Upstate Citizens Review Panel will serve as a partner with the Department of Social Services.

SCDSS agrees with this recommendation and will continue to be responsive to requests of partnering with the Upstate Citizens Review Panel to conduct quality assurance process when there is proper notice and clearance of all staff participating.

LOOKING AHEAD

The South Carolina Citizen Review Panel has experienced some transitions in the past few years with changes in the staff coordinator position and the organization providing staff support. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Panel's ability to hold public events and recruit new members in recent months. Notwithstanding these events, members of the Citizen Review Panel remain committed to the goal of improving the child welfare system.

The Panel looks forward to the coming year and will focus on several new areas. The Upstate Panel has begun exploring the relationship between child welfare staff and guardians ad litem, and how this might affect case progress. The Midlands Panel recognizes the gravity, complexity, and sometimes traumatic work of child protection caseworkers, and will review policies and practices related to their mental health well-being. The Lowcountry Panel will continue the Panel's priority on kinship care, with a particular focus on the provision of financial support for kinship families.

In addition to these important substantive areas, the Panel has identified the following operational goals to strengthen its long-term efficiency and effectiveness:

- 1) Fill the coordinator's position with a well-qualified professional to support the panel's work
- 2) Secure a graduate student intern to assist with panel research
- 3) Develop a recruitment plan to expand and diversify panel membership
- 4) Formalize an orientation program for new members
- 5) Implement an annual timeline to assist the panels in approaching their work in a systematic way
- 6) Add a second statewide membership event to assist in planning topics for the year
- 7) Update and expand the Panel's website and social media presence along with a process for documenting community feedback.

Citizen Review Panels were established as a vehicle for citizen input in assessing each state's fulfillment of its responsibility to protect children. The South Carolina Citizen Review Panel is excited to renew its commitment to this purpose.

APPENDIX (SEE RECOMMENDATION #1)

Note: The attached letters from Lois Richter, Director of Beaufort County DSS, were prepared when Susan Alford was State Director. The current State Director is Michael Leach.



HENRY McMASTER, GOVERNOR
V. SUSAN ALFORD, STATE DIRECTOR



An open letter to those seeking assistance from Hopeful Horizons RE: DSS Services

Hello. If you are reading this letter, that means you are a victim of domestic violence and you are seeking assistance from Hopeful Horizons. Please know that the Department of Social Services values Hopeful Horizons and considers this program to be an important community partner. We understand the confidentiality policies that Hopeful Horizons has in place and we are respectful of your right to privacy. We do hope, however, that you will consider working with us so that we can assist you as you move forward.

Our agency offers assistance with SNAP benefits, employment, and housing. We have a job developer on staff who meets with clients and assists with job applications, training, and even transportation costs. We are linked in with adult education programs and the Vocational Rehabilitation Center here in Beaufort, all designed to assist individuals to improve their lives.

We are truly a one stop center to assist individuals and families with all of their needs. We make referrals for mental health counseling, the Disabilities Board, parenting classes, Baby Net, Drugs and Alcohol, and many other community partners. We have Medicaid housed in our office so that clients can get health coverage for themselves and their children. You do not have to have a case of abuse or neglect with the Department of Social Services in order for us to assist you with the services we offer.

If you do have an open DSS case, please know that our case managers are trained to work with families, and to assist with addressing the issues that caused the case to be opened.

We sincerely hope that you will contact us if we can be of service to you. If you wish to ask me any questions at all about the services we provide, you may call

BEAUFORT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
P.O. BOX 1065, BEAUFORT, SC 29901-1065
PH: 843-255-6080

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me directly and ask anything you want. You do not have to identify yourself to me. I am more than happy to speak with you.

Please feel free to contact me at 843 255 6199, and if you miss me in the office, please call me on my mobile at 843 592 0952. If you get my voice mail, you do not have to leave your name. Just leave the name of your counselor and I will call her back and she can connect us.

I hope to hear from you if you have any questions or can think of some way in which we can be of service. We wish you every success as you work to heal.

Sincerely,

Lois Dane Richter, M.Ed. L.P.C.
County Director



HENRY McMASTER, GOVERNOR
V. SUSAN ALFORD, STATE DIRECTOR



An open letter to those seeking assistance from Hopeful Horizons RE: CPS Cases

Hello. If you are reading this letter, that means that you are a victim of domestic violence and you are seeking services from Hopeful Horizons.

Please know that the Department of Social Services values Hopeful Horizons and considers this organization to be an important community partner. We understand the confidentiality policies that Hopeful Horizons has in place and we are respectful of your right to privacy.

We do hope, however, that you will consider working with the Department of Social Services so that we can assist you as you move forward. We know that the general public views the Department of Social Services in a bad light. We often get accused of “taking people’s children” and “breaking families apart”. While it is true that there are times when we ask a Family Court judge or law enforcement officers to remove children, there have to be risk factors that are proven in court before such actions can be taken. The children have to be at imminent risk and that is a very high standard for us to meet.

Taking children from their homes and families is truly the last thing we want to do, but we must remove children if they are in danger of further abuse or neglect. We would much rather have the alleged offender leave the home, and if that is not possible, then we will seek to place the children in the home of a relative or close family friend to keep the children safe from harm. We want to work with the entire

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family, parents, and children, so that a healthy reunification can occur whenever possible.

We recognize that domestic violence harms not only the victim but the children as well, and we develop our treatment plans to address the abuser and his/her needs and we also address any needs of the victim and children.

If you do have an open DSS case, please know that our case managers are trained to work with families, assisting with addressing the issues that caused the case to be opened, and our goal whenever possible, is always reunification.

We sincerely hope that you will contact us if we can be of service to you. If you wish to ask me any questions at all about the services we provide, you may call me directly and ask anything you want. You do not have to identify yourself to me. I am more than happy to speak with you.

Please call me at 843 255 6199 and if you miss me in the office, call me on my mobile number at 843 592 0952. If you get my voice messaging system, leave the name of your counselor at Hopeful Horizons and I will call her back and she can connect us.

I hope to hear from you if you have any questions or can think of some way in which we can be of service. We wish you every success as you work to heal.

Sincerely,

Lois Dane Richter, M.Ed., L.P.C.
County Director

THANK YOU.

