

State releases outside review of child welfare staffing, organization

by Bend Weekly News Sources

National study supports agency's move toward new child safety model

A federal report released Tuesday by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) validates the direction the state has been moving to improve child protective services.

At the state's request, the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement provided technical assistance to ODHS to identify opportunities to improve the safety of children in Oregon's child welfare system.

"We're pleased that the direction we've been moving is supported by the report's recommendations," said ODHS Director Bruce Goldberg, M.D. "We will continue to standardize best practices and procedures, provide additional training to staff and supervisors, and consider a statewide workload study to ensure that staffing is aligned with the new child safety model."

In addition to a review of ODHS policy, procedure, research and data, the NRCOI conducted individual interviews, held focus groups in field and central offices and surveyed more than 680 staff, including supervisors, caseworkers, consultant education trainers and social service assistants.

The NRCOI is an office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The state's request was prompted by a report by the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services that identified staff development and supervision as two of seven necessary elements for an effective child safety intervention system.

In its report, the NRCOI recommended shifting non-casework duties such as those normally accomplished by attorneys or paralegals away from caseworkers. The Legislative Emergency Board last year set aside \$2.5 million in General Fund dollars for DHS to access legal representation in child welfare cases. This initiative was implemented May 1, 2006.

The report also recommended creating a procedure manual to guide frontline staff. DHS is finalizing a 10-chapter procedure manual and has trained 1,800 staff on the new child safety model key concepts.

The child safety model, developed by the NRCCPS for Oregon, is the basis for the procedure manual and is a comprehensive, step-by-step child protective services guide.

The report is available on the ODHS Web site: http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/news/2007news/t-a-r_report.pdf

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