

**STATE OF LOUISIANA  
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW  
REVISED/RENEGOTIATED  
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN  
FEBRUARY 15, 2007 PROGRESS REPORT**



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Louisiana developed its original Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in September 2004 to address deficiencies noted in the 2003 Child and Family Services Review. The targeted completion date was September 30, 2006, and a great deal of progress had been made both on reaching data goals related to national standards and benchmark completion when Hurricane Katrina, followed closely by Hurricane Rita, devastated southern Louisiana, disseminated the population of the state's largest urban area throughout the country, and disrupted all normal operations of the Office of Community Services, including PIP progress.

Subsequently, with the cooperation and assistance of our Federal partners, a renegotiated/revised PIP was submitted on June 14, 2006 and approved on June 19, 2006, with an extended completion date of September 30, 2007. This revised PIP focuses on short-term recovery efforts to assure safety, well-being and permanency for Louisiana's children including those who were displaced to other states as a result of the hurricanes. While addressing these short-term recovery efforts, Louisiana is taking advantage of the opportunities brought about by the storms to assess and plan for long-term reform. The reform efforts will be targeted toward a redesign of front-end efforts emphasizing prevention and decreasing the number of children in residential and emergency care facilities. These reform activities are underway with the support of the National Resource Centers and the Casey Family Foundation.

The renegotiated/revised PIP provides a proactive approach toward recovery from the devastation left in the wake of the hurricanes and focuses on the six child welfare outcomes Louisiana had not achieved in the Child and Family Services Review:

*Safety 1:* Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.

*Safety 2:* Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible.

*Permanency 1:* Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

*Well Being 1:* Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

*Well Being 2:* Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

*Well Being 3:* Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

**DATA GOALS**

When Louisiana submitted its first progress report on the revised/renegotiated PIP in November 2006, the following national data goals had been achieved:

Reunification: Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, what percentage was reunified in less than twelve months from the time of the latest removal from home?

National Standard:	76.2% or more
Louisiana Baseline:	68.5%
PIP Goal (original):	72.3%
PIP Goal (renegotiated):	70.92% (based on 2.42% sampling error)
Federal FY 05 Data:	71.10% (goal met)

Adoption in Twenty-Four Months: Of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than twenty-four months from the time of the latest removal from home?

National Standard:	32% or more
Louisiana Baseline:	18.9%
PIP Goal (original):	21.8%
Federal FY 05 Data:	24.5% (goal met)

Placement Stability: Of all children served who have been in foster care less than twelve months from the time of the latest removal from home, what percentage have had no more than two placement settings?

National Standard:	86.7% or more
Louisiana Baseline:	80.9%
PIP Goal (original):	85%
PIP Goal (renegotiated):	81.9% (based on 1% or ½ sampling error, rounded up)
Federal FY 05 Data:	82% (goal met)

Recurrence of Maltreatment: Of all children associated with a substantiated, indicated, or alternative response victim finding of maltreatment during the first six months of the reporting period, what percentage had another substantiated, indicated, or alternative response victim finding of maltreatment within a six-month period?

National Standard:	6.1% or less
Louisiana Baseline:	8.7%
PIP Goal (original):	7.8%
Federal FY 05 Data:	6.6% (goal met)

On February 6, 2007, Louisiana was informed that the final outstanding federal data indicator was considered met as of December 2006.

Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care: Of all children who were served in foster care during the reporting period, what percentage were found to be victims of maltreatment? A child is counted as having been maltreated in foster care if the

perpetrator of the maltreatment was identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff.

National Standard:	.57% or less
Louisiana Baseline	1.78%
PIP Goal (original):	1.64%
PIP Goal (renegotiated):	1.64%
Federal FY 05 Data:	0.32% (goal met)

In that all federal data goals have now been considered as met by the Administration for Children and Families(ACF), future PIP reports will not include data indicator information.

### **OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS**

The renegotiated PIP contains three major objectives: analysis of current CPI data, practice, and external factors as they relate to the increase in children entering foster care; development and implementation of a protocol for case management and decision-making for displaced children and their biological families; and provision of more qualified legal representation for children and/or parents in the child welfare system. Each of these objectives reflects consultation with the child welfare national resource centers, and is subdivided into strategies and action steps for achievement of each of the three overarching objectives. Sixteen action steps were slated for completion during the first quarter of implementation, each of which was completed.

No action steps were slated for completion during the second quarter of implementation of the revised/renegotiated PIP. Therefore, a summary of hurricane recovery issues and long term reform activities will be described in this report.

#### ***Staffing***

*Vacancy and Turnover Rates:* Assuring the safety, permanency and well being of the children of the State is dependent upon having a stable, appropriately educated and well trained staff. Our current legislatively approved staffing level is 1825, down from 1860 prior to the hurricanes. All but about 45 of the approved positions are filled, resulting in a vacancy rate of only 2.5%. The low vacancy rate is attributable to a recently implemented recruitment strategy whereby 30 to 50 staff are hired throughout the state as temporary special job appointments which do not require legislative approval. These positions are placed strategically throughout the regions based on need and availability of funds. All usual affirmative action and educational requirements apply to these employees, who receive all required training during their temporary status, and are ready to step into a permanent position when a vacancy occurs. Additionally, the special entrance pay rate for Child Welfare Trainees and Specialists 1 who hold an MSW or related master's degree was increased by 10% to enhance recruitment and maintain a low vacancy rate.

Recruitment is especially important as staff turnover has increased significantly since the hurricanes. In SFY 2005-2006, the turnover rate was 15.86%, the highest in seven years. Efforts to reduce turnover include increasing the number of Child Welfare Specialist 3 positions to provide in-line career development opportunities and improve morale. The Specialist 3 duties will vary according to local needs, including managing specialized caseloads, serving as lead worker for a supervisory unit, or acting as an assistant supervisor.

Only 11 employees were laid off and their positions were lost as a result of the storms. A number of additional staff were placed on furlough, but all of those who were willing and able returned to work by July 2006. Staff displaced by the hurricanes were allowed to work in the office nearest to where they were living that had a caseload that justified the need. Those who wished to return to the Greater New Orleans Region have been allowed to do so as the caseload in that region increased. Currently, very few employees who have requested a return to the New Orleans area are still working in another part of the state.

Repopulation of the New Orleans area has varied by parish, with Orleans Parish having the lowest return population rate. The staffing level in Orleans Parish is about 100 employees, or about 50% of the pre-hurricane level. In the Jefferson District staffing is about 200, approximately at the pre-storm level.

Population shifts continue to occur within the state, and the Human Resources and Field Services Divisions collaborate extensively through bi-weekly information exchange meetings. A position control data base was established as a result of the hurricanes, and continues to be operational. The only potentially significant demographic shift in the population served by the agency involves the large influx of Hispanic workers who are employed in the reconstruction of the Greater New Orleans Region. OCS is currently exploring the level of impact the Hispanic population is having on caseloads, the number of bilingual (Spanish/English) staff in the region, and possible recruitment methods to encourage bilingual applicants should that be determined necessary.

*Staff Support:* Grief counseling was made available to staff in the aftermath of the hurricanes, and has ended. The Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team was dormant after the hurricanes, but has resumed operation and begun recruiting new members. Team membership requires an application and interview selection process, and members receive training from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. Additionally, Louisiana Spirit, one of the state-funded hurricane recovery initiatives provides no cost individual counseling to those affected by the hurricanes, and agency administration has made staff aware of this service and encouraged their use of it. Further, staff within and outside the hurricane-affected areas has been very supportive of one another.

*Staff Training and Education:* All regularly offered training activities that were suspended after the hurricanes have resumed. The frequency of legislatively required core curriculum new worker training has increased as a result of the increased turnover

rate and the population shift resulting in staff working in different programs necessitating cross-training. In order to accommodate the increased number of training sessions, three former employees have been hired in temporary positions to provide staff training. One of the former employees is housed in Shreveport, one in Alexandria, and one in Baton Rouge. Having trainers in various areas of the state makes training more accessible for regional staff, and saves travel time and money. The Introduction to Child Welfare series is now being held two to three times per month, with at least one of the sessions in north or central Louisiana and at least one in the Baton Rouge area.

Each of the agency's reform efforts has a training component, and the Training Section is actively involved in working with our partners from the child welfare national resource centers to develop training sessions for these initiatives, some of which will be conducted in-house and some contracted. The Training Section is also working with National Resource Centers to enhance Cultural Competence training to include working with the growing Hispanic population in the Greater New Orleans Region.

The federal Title IV-E stipend program continues as a critical component of meeting the educational requirements for educationally competent staff. The stipend program was minimally affected by the hurricanes. New stipends are awarded for the fall semester only; applications will be due in April, with stipends to be awarded in June, for the 2007-2008 academic year.

*Supervision:* The ratio of workers to supervisors following the hurricanes was an issue in that more supervisors returned to work than were initially needed. Through the close working arrangements between Human Resources and Field Services Divisions, the agency was able to place all former supervisors back in supervisory jobs prior to the Civil Service deadline at which they would have had to be demoted. The efforts to assure that no supervisors were demoted were consistent with the overall commitment of the agency administration to provide as much support to staff as possible, while minimizing any potential negative employment actions. These efforts to retain pre-hurricane employment status for supervisors were instrumental in providing increased staff stability and may have prevented additional employee turnover.

Twenty-four supervisors received intensive training through a mentoring program provided under contract with nationally recognized expert Marsha Salas. The agency is considering expanding and continuing the mentoring program, but no firm decision has been made at this time. Ms. Salas continues to provide training for supervisors, including sessions that were held in January 2007.

### ***Infrastructure***

*Space:* In the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes, the entire Greater New Orleans region staff was housed in the Jefferson Parish East Bank office, resulting in nearly intolerable working conditions. Since then, the Jefferson West Bank office and the Orleans office have reopened, and all workers have their own desks and computers. Plaquemines Parish staff continues to work out of the Jefferson west bank office and St. Bernard Parish continues to work out of the Jefferson east bank office, but overcrowding

is not a problem in these offices. There are no plans in the foreseeable future to reopen either the St. Bernard or Plaquemines office. In Plaquemines Parish, a coalition of various social service and mental health providers opened a one-stop, private not-for-profit, social service center. It is anticipated that at some point in the future, OCS will utilize space in this center for interviewing and family visits.

In Lake Charles Region and in the Orleans District, parish and regional office space was combined as a cost-saving measure. Increased caseloads and resulting increased staffing has resulted in overcrowding in those offices. Population shifts have caused overcrowding in Bossier Parish in the Shreveport Region and in Livingston Parish in the Baton Rouge Region. Alleviating overcrowded conditions is contingent on budget, and plans are underway to obtain the necessary funding to alleviate overcrowded working conditions, with the overarching goal of co-housing as many Department of Social Services (DSS) agencies as possible to improve services for consumers served by multiple DSS agencies and to improve cost efficiency.

*Accessibility:* All of the buildings occupied by agency and used by agency consumers comply with federal, state, and local legal requirements regarding facility accessibility. Closure of the St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish offices following the hurricanes reduces accessibility to those offices by consumers. Home visits and in-home services ameliorate this access limitation to some extent, and eventual utilization of the Plaquemines Center will further enhance the ability of consumers to access agency services.

*Records:* Case records were destroyed only in St. Bernard Parish. Those records were reconstructed using court records, computer records, IV-E documentation, and packets that had been sent to state office prior to the 2005 storms for various service authorizations. The reconstructed records and all others are securely maintained according to legally mandated timeframes.

The agency is working toward digital imaging of records to assure their safety in the event of a future disaster. The project has been designed; a strategy has been developed; and the Statement of Work has been signed by the company doing the pilot, the Information Technology Director and DSS staff. It has been forwarded to the Louisiana Division of Administration for final approval. Digital imaging of records is expected begin in March 2007. A target completion date has not been established.

*Emergency Preparedness:* DSS has contracted with Innovative Emergency Management, Inc., a consulting firm experienced in emergency planning for large organizations to develop a Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP) to assure continuation of services in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. The COOP plan identifies for the department as a whole and for each agency within the department essential functions of operation, orders of succession, a roster of key employees statewide, delegation of authority in areas of Child Protection Investigations and Foster Care case management, devolution to regional leadership if state office staff is inaccessible for 24 hours or more, alternative work facilities, essential functions and supporting dependencies such as unaccompanied

children and foster care case management, ways to support personnel, supplies, records, and other necessities so that work can be carried on, and examines interoperable communication (alternative providers and modes of communication).

*Information Technology:* Development of A Comprehensive Enterprise Social Service System (ACCESS) had begun prior to the hurricanes. ACCESS will serve as Louisiana's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), but is broader than most SACWIS systems in that it will integrate information from all DSS agencies. Full implementation has been delayed, but ACCESS has been implemented statewide for the Child Protection Investigations program. ACCESS training has been, and continues to be, a major responsibility of the Training Section.

### ***Performance and Quality Improvement***

*Traditional Quality Assurance:* Traditional quality assurance reviews had resumed in all regions following temporary disruption after the hurricanes; however, quality assurance reviews for CPI cases only have been suspended statewide as a result of ACCESS implementation in that program. It had been hoped that many of the traditional QA review items could be reviewed at 100% through ACCESS reports, alleviating the need for record reviews on these data items. ACCESS is capable of producing such reports, but is not doing so at this time. A firm date has not been set for resumption of QA reviews of CPI cases.

The Quality Assurance Section is working on several initiatives.

- An intranet annual report concept, building a platform in three parts: population information from census and client profile information at state, region, and parish levels; typical QA information in annual reports with drill down to region/parish (this will complement information that is currently being provided to regions for several of the original Program Improvement Plan corrective action measures with drill down to worker level); and federal data standards outcome information with drill down no lower than regional level.
- The Louisiana Court Improvement Project has received a grant focused on data and analysis. Efforts are underway to develop standards for court procedures and data systems, and standardizing the meaning of data across types of courts. The QA Section Administrator will be involved in this data development with the ultimate goal of electronic communication between the courts and the agency. The grant is for five years, and the first year will be devoted to strategic planning.
- Movement toward more qualitative QA reviews. Qualitative data needs have been identified, but data sources have not. The agency has used Peer Case Reviews for several years to obtain qualitative information, and efforts are underway to develop an integration of Peer Case Review and QA data to provide a more useable feedback loop for agency administration and field staff.

*Peer Case Reviews:* Formal peer case reviews were suspended after the hurricanes. The Peer Case Review Committee, in consultation with Peter Watson of the National

Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, is preparing to reinstitute Peer Case Reviews at the beginning of SFY 2007-2008. Lead coordinators have been identified, and the review instrument is being revised.

In the absence of a formalized Peer Case Review process, a number of ad hoc case record reviews have been conducted.

- Family service case reviews were conducted by state office staff, and state office staff continues to review records in the field, providing feedback to field staff.
- Foster Care reviews have been completed for the Independent Living and Young Adult Programs, and for Foster Care Special Board Rates. The record reviews have been completed, but the data analysis has not been completed to provide feedback to field staff.
- Individual case reviews for all programs have been completed on Katrina Class cases (the Katrina Class is comprised of all children in agency custody and foster care alumni participating in the Young Adult Program who were displaced either to another state or to another area of Louisiana as a result of the hurricanes).
- A Title IV-E case review has been completed.
- Home Development regional staff has been asked to contact underutilized foster/adoptive parents to get information on their availability, but the information is not being rolled up or documented.
- A review of 100% of residential cases is being conducted including interviews with each child in residential placement.

CPI record reviews have not been done. The CPI Section Administrator compiled lists of factors that could be contributory to the increase in foster care entries, and the Quality Assurance Section has provided various data sets representative of these factors. The data is currently being analyzed by CPI staff. Upon completion of the data analysis, a determination will be made as to the necessity of reviewing CPI cases, particularly for the effects of legislation regarding kinship care placements and substance exposed infants.

*Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI):* Agency recovery and reform efforts took precedence over regular CQI meetings for an extended period. The statewide CQI committee has resumed regular meetings, as have all regions except the New Orleans District in the Greater New Orleans Region. The region reports that the issues being addressed prior to the hurricanes have become insignificant in light of the recovery and reform efforts currently underway, and a time frame for resuming regular meetings has not yet been established.

The agency's work with both Casey Strategic Consulting Group and the federally funded child welfare national resource centers contain a performance and quality improvement component, as these reform efforts are data and performance-driven. A steering committee for the reform efforts has taken on a quasi-CQI role. The committee has met for between one-half and one day every two weeks since June 2006. Case reviews and forums are held regularly on the status of the reform initiatives, and the steering committee meetings have been held to analyze case reviews, results and outcomes of

forums held on the reforms, measure progress on the plan for reform, conduct actual case studies, and consider how to use statistical data.

*Consumer Satisfaction:* Consumer satisfaction surveys continue to be distributed and collected at parish and regional offices, and the results rolled up for CQI review and development of corrective action plans as needed. Survey boxes for state office have not been installed since the move to the new DSS headquarters building.

The Consumer Satisfaction and Feedback Mechanisms Subcommittee has resumed regular meetings, and a major issue under consideration is accessibility of the agency telephone number for members of the general public who need to report child abuse or neglect.

*Stakeholder involvement:* Our stakeholders continue to contribute to our efforts. The Consumer and Community CQI stakeholder subcommittee is being reinstated with a planned survey of members. The results of the survey will serve as a guide for future goals of this subcommittee. In addition to the work of this subcommittee, state office staff has traveled to the regions to meet with contractors, hold community forums, and meet with agency staff.

#### ***Short-term Recovery Achievements***

*CPI and Family Services:* Within the first month following Katrina, CPI and FS/Prevention State Office staff met with regional staff, and discussed each open case based on the family's situation immediately preceding the hurricane, with much information based on memory of local staff as many records remained unavailable. Cases were triaged according to court involvement and level of risk. Families who were located were referred for services in the state, region or parish where they were located. Assistance was obtained from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in locating families, and a nation-wide protective services alert was issued for families who could not be located with one or more children determined to be at high risk.

*Children in Foster Care and Their Caregivers:* Immediately after the storms, the agency began working with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and established a dedicated call-in line to determine the whereabouts of all children in foster care and their foster parents who had evacuated. Later, the agency worked in consultation with the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning to develop and implement a protocol for contact with children and foster parents displaced by the storm to assure their safety.

A special "Katrina Class" was established and a staff person was appointed to assure that the displaced children in foster care and their caregivers had worker contact and received needed services. When agency offices reopened in the Greater New Orleans region, Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children referrals were made on all out-of-state children to request service provision by the state in which they were residing. Foster children in residential facilities who were relocated out of state were visited by a member of the State Office Residential staff. All children in foster care who relocated to other

areas within the state were contacted by agency staff in the regions/parishes where they were located. An instrument was developed for use in contacting foster children and their caretakers to capture information to assure safety and identify needed services. Through the intensive efforts with “Katrina Class” foster children and their caregivers, remarkable progress has been made in reducing the number of children who remained out of state. As of February 12, 2007, only 35 children in foster care remained out of state. Of these 35 children, 21 have a goal of adoption, 3 have a goal of transfer of guardianship, and 11 have a goal of Alternate Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. All children in foster care who have a goal of reunification and were evacuated out of state have returned to Louisiana.

*Biological Parents of Displaced Children in Foster Care:* Beginning in April 2006, a procedure was established to collect and update information on missing parents. Courts in the Greater New Orleans Region reopened shortly after Katrina, and efforts to locate parents were coordinated among court personnel, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and OCS staff. The agency also partnered with the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning to develop innovative methods of locating parents, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) provided assistance. By using Federal and State Parent Locator Service, various internet search engines, data from FEMA and the Red Cross, and information from other states, all biological parents active as service consumers with the agency and whose whereabouts were unknown as a result of hurricane evacuations have been located.

*Family Visitation for Displaced Children:* Strategies and procedures were developed to facilitate visitation between displaced children in foster care and their biological families. OCS Memorandum 06-024 was issued on March 22, 2006, providing staff with guidelines for arranging and supervising visits between children in foster care and their biological parents. OCS Memorandum 06-005 was issued in January to establish payment codes for crisis transportation and crisis travel related expenses for visitation among displaced children and their families. A liaison position was established to facilitate contact between state office and the regions and to assure a smooth and consistent process of travel expense approval.

*Case Planning for Displaced Children:* An informal task force consisting of OCS staff, CASA, and the courts was established upon reopening of courts in the hurricane impacted areas. The group has been in continuous contact to facilitate and assure appropriate decision making for children residing in other states due to hurricane evacuation. Each Katrina Class case was reviewed, and Katrina Class Casework was established to facilitate case plan implementation and movement toward permanence. An instrument was developed for Katrina Class Case Reviews and used to assess the appropriateness of the placement and identify an individualized plan for each Katrina Class child. OCS has received and continues to receive assistance from private and governmental entities in this endeavor.

With input from partners, the decision making model already defined in agency policy continues to be used in a case-by-case manner with each Katrina class child, in- and out-

of state. The essential elements of this model are the best interest of the child and close review by the court with emphasis on the safety, well being, and permanency of each child.

*Legal Jurisdiction for Displaced Children:* For the most part, legal jurisdiction for children displaced by the hurricanes has not changed. A case-by-case analysis of the most appropriate jurisdiction was completed, involving collaboration between jurisdictions. In some cases, parties participate in judicial reviews and hearings by telephone rather than in person. Members of the legal system have been active partners in assuring that the best interests of children and families involved with the child welfare system are served.

*Legal Training:* The state, through the Court Improvement Program, is working with the National Resource Centers for Organizational Improvement and for Legal and Judicial Issues to provide more qualified legal representation for children and/or parents involved with the child welfare system and impacted by the hurricanes. This collaborative effort has resulted in online Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses posted on the Louisiana Children's Legal Advocacy Resource Online and available to attorneys throughout the state. These free and convenient CLE courses are expected to generate interest and train attorneys to provide qualified legal representation for storm impacted children and families. Training has also been developed by the Louisiana Court Improvement Program with child welfare resource center collaboration on how to advocate for children and families in the context of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Live trainings, including ethics and professionalism, have been delivered in Shreveport, New Iberia, Leesville, New Orleans and Monroe. Training is planned for Alexandria in March 2007.

The Court Improvement Program is also offering training for agency staff and others involved with the child welfare judicial system on mediation in Child in Need of Care proceedings. This mediation training is expected to result in creating an environment that encourages and allows communication among all parties, enhancing communication and problem solving skills, and providing staff with an opportunity to collaborate and work in partnership with other professionals. Additionally, an on-line course has been published to guide juvenile courts in the development of emergency preparedness plans. Development of this training was a collaborative effort of the Children's Bureau, the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Center for State Courts.

### ***Long-Term Reform***

*Opportunity for Change:* The Agency mission was changed by Act 110 of the 2005 Louisiana Regular Legislative Session to include child abuse and neglect prevention. The addition of prevention services to the agency mission combined with the devastation of the hurricanes provided a unique opportunity to rebuild the child welfare system in Louisiana by developing and implementing long-term reform efforts. Reform efforts are guided by the principle that children's needs are best met in their own homes whenever this can be safely accomplished. Thus, the agency is working diligently to assure that an appropriate service array is developed so that children under agency supervision and their

biological parents are provided appropriated community-based services to assure the safety and well being of those children. The focus of these efforts is as follows:

- Development of a comprehensive service array to allow more children to be served in families
- Re-design of home development to recruit and better support foster parents
- Limitations on the use of residential placements so that only older children who cannot be served in family settings are placed in residential care
- Assessment of Medicaid review for purposes of establishing funding for services for children in custody, particularly those who are now in residential placement
- Redesign of the Independent Living program for adolescents in foster care.

*Assistance from Partners:* The reform efforts have been enhanced through agency partnerships with ACF, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. Our federal partners have provided significant assistance in these reform efforts by providing training and technical assistance through the child welfare national resource centers. As a part of the PIP renegotiation, and to ensure safety, well being and permanency for the children and families served by the agency, ACF agreed to provide assistance from the National Resource Centers for Child Protective Services, Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, Legal and Judicial Issues, Youth Development, Adoption, Organizational Improvement, Data and Information Technology, Children's Mental Health, and Friends National Resource Center. A matrix of the efforts of the resource centers was developed that identifies how each will assist in reaching desired child welfare outcomes. The resource centers work with the agency through teleconferences and on-site visits of a particular center with the associated agency program, and progress is measured through teleconferences held every six weeks involving all resource centers and involved agency staff. Following each of these teleconferences, the matrix of resource center involvement is updated.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation through the Casey Strategic Consulting Group is also providing intense assistance to the agency in accomplishing reform efforts. The Casey group provides regular on-site consultation and monitoring of agency progress, identifying methods of achieving the long-term reform goals, and identifying barriers to achievement. The Casey group is working with the agency to assist in developing a comprehensive service array that will allow more children to be served in families by incorporating evidence-based and in-home therapeutic and social services into agency practice; redesign of home development to recruit and support foster parents, and limiting the use of residential placements to children who cannot be served in a family setting.

The MacArthur Foundation is consulting with the Children's Cabinet, which is working with our agency and with the state Office of Youth Development to increase access to Mental Health Rehabilitation services to clients of the two agencies. The foundation is funding a support position within the Children's Cabinet to facilitate Medicaid funding for mental health services. The foundation is also providing consultation with a licensing expert to provide feedback on our draft residential licensing agreement.

*Child Protection Investigations:* An effort closely related to the mission change is front-end intake and an alternative response system. The CPI Section is working with the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services to develop an alternative response system for families who have been referred for child abuse or neglect. Alternative response is based on the premise that the family has come to the attention of the child welfare agency because of family problems and the focus is on resolving those problems rather than establishing validity of an allegation. OCS was using a similar “Assessment Model” in Orleans and East and West Jefferson Parishes prior to the hurricanes. In Orleans Parish, the program was implemented under a contract that was cancelled, with no plans for resurrection, after Katrina.

The current plan is to expand from East and West Jefferson into Baton Rouge and Covington Regions, and to use in-house staff. At the point of intake, the family situation will be assessed, and, depending on the nature of the allegation, referred for alternative response or investigation. Policy and assessment criteria continue to be developed by a workgroup consisting of agency staff of all levels with input from the national resource center and the American Humane Society. Staffing and training have been identified as keys to the success of the project. The parishes involved in the “Assessment Model”, were large enough to have dedicated units, but the expansion will involve smaller parishes where workload distribution will be a factor in successful implementation of alternative response. OCS recognizes that excellent training will be required and is developing training plans.

Although not specifically a CPI initiative, all new professional staff are required to complete the foster/adoptive parent training, which is now the second course in the required curriculum. In the past, only foster care and adoption staff were required to complete this training. Participating in this training will assure that CPI and family services/prevention staff have a better understanding of the implications of foster care placement.

*Family Services/Prevention:* In the aftermath of the 2005 hurricanes, the Family Services (FS)/Prevention Section undertook a survey of staff at the parish level across the state to identify local service needs and to explore the availability of local service providers. Subsequently, state office staff met with staff from each parish, and five areas of greatest need were identified: in-home services, substance abuse treatment, transportation, domestic violence intervention, and mental health services. The FS/Prevention section is focusing on three of those identified needs as follows:

- In-home services: Contracts with Intensive Home Based Service (IHBS) providers are being revamped. The agency’s goal is to provide in-home services in all regions. The agency is moving to comprehensive use of the Homebuilders® model, which is an intensive family-focused prevention model. In this model, children at imminent risk of harm are referred for the in-home model rather than being placed in foster care. A group of OCS staff, accompanied by staff from the Casey Strategic Consulting Group, visited the Institute of Family Development in Federal Way, Washington to explore Homebuilders®. Funding for the trip was made available by

OCS's partner, statewide Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana. The FS/Prevention Section Administrator and consultants have traveled to the regions to train staff on the use of the new model, which includes a family assessment instrument that closely follows the North Carolina Family Assessment Survey (NCFAS), the basis of the assessment used in the Homebuilders® model. The assessment instrument is currently being piloted in a paper format, and efforts are underway to provide the assessment in an automated format.

Additionally, The FS/Prevention Section has contracted with Jefferson Parish Human Services District (a state-local agency) for implementation of Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), another evidence-based, intensive, in-home program focused on behavior disordered youth ages 12-18 and their families in several areas of the state.

- Substance abuse treatment: A Memorandum of Understanding has been negotiated with the Office of Addictive Disorders for in-house substance abuse counselors to be shared with the Office of Family Support, the statewide financial assistance agency. The FS/Prevention Section Administrator is informing parish and regional staff about the availability of substance abuse counselors during her travels throughout the state. Efforts are also underway to develop outpatient substance abuse services in areas of the state where no inpatient substance abuse treatment is available.
- Transportation: Efforts to improve transportation services include exploring the addition of funds to Family Resource Center Contracts so that they would be able to provide transportation.

*Foster Care:* The focus of reform efforts related to foster care is on reducing the number of children who enter foster care through the initiatives described above, assuring the most appropriate, least restrictive placements for children who must enter foster care, and improving adult outcomes for foster care alumni.

The number of children entering foster care has risen in Louisiana. The Child Protection Investigation and Quality Assurance Sections are working with the National Resource Center on Data and Technology to identify root causes of this increase. Alternative response and the improved service array described above are expected to reduce the number of new foster care entries, as is implementation of Family Group Decision Making, also known as Family Group Counseling, in Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Lafayette regions. These conferences bring together the client's family, friends, neighbors, and other support systems and involved agencies to participate in developing a family-centered, strengths-based plan to assure the safety of involved children. This process can begin at any point in the family's involvement with the agency and may be useful in identifying resources that would prevent the child's entry into foster care, hasten reunification, or assure the least restrictive placement for a child in care.

Kinship care placement is recognized as the least restrictive and most appropriate placement for children in foster care. Through a grant received by the Louisiana State Supreme Court, agency staff has been trained in the Family Finding model, an initiative

begun in Washington State to locate family members of children in foster care. The training provided staff knowledge and hands-on experience in using various internet search engines to locate individuals, even if only a name is known, and provides information on stages of search, beginning by going back to initial agency involvement. Louisiana also competed for and was awarded an ACF grant to demonstrate effective collaboration between child welfare and TANF agencies. This grant will be used to develop and enhance an existing mental health system of care for children with mental illness and their families in the Greater New Orleans region and to identify and develop service resource for kinship care families across the spectrum of child welfare services from prevention work with TANF only families to improved outcomes for youth aging out of care.

Intense efforts are also being made to increase the pool of foster families available to meet the needs of children in foster care. A dedicated recruitment specialist is being hired in each region, an abbreviated home study process has been implemented for child specific placements, the standard foster/adoptive parent training has been synthesized into seven sessions rather than the 10 sessions previously required, and key elements of foster/adoptive parent training have been issued as power point presentations to assure consistency throughout the state.

Compared with other states, Louisiana has a disproportionate number of children and youth in residential placement. As indicated earlier, each residential case is being reviewed, including an interview with the youth or child in order to determine if a less restrictive placement would be appropriate. This effort, along with efforts to identify relative placement resources, increase the pool of foster parents, and improve the array of community based services is expected to reduce OCS's reliance on residential placement.

The entire Independent Living and Young Adult Program is being reviewed and upgraded to enhance adult outcomes for foster care alumni. Five workgroups are simultaneously exploring ways to improve independent living services and accessibility, improve the young adult program, improve coordination of Independent Living services and communication among the individuals and entities involved with the youth, increase youth involvement, and develop an interagency collaborative approach to assuring a broad array of seamless services.

### ***Conclusion***

Short term recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been successful. Louisiana is committed to maintaining the same level of effort to assure that the long term reform efforts currently underway result in improved outcomes for the children and families of the state. We firmly believe that with our continued commitment and that of our partners, Louisiana will emerge from the devastation of the hurricanes with a state of the art child welfare system.