

## **Citizens Review Group: Citizen Services Group**

*Report to Governor-Elect Crist and Lt. Governor-Elect Kottkamp*

### **The Department of Children and Family Services**

#### **Overview**

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) is the current iteration of an action taken by the 1968 Constitutional Revision Commission to place all the health and welfare boards under an umbrella known as the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. In 1975 the Legislature consolidated the structure into a single enterprise and in 1999 changed the name to the Department of Children and Family Services. The Department receives its statutory authority primarily from Chapter 409 but is empowered and tasked throughout the Florida Statutes for activities and programs in the social service arena.

DCF is Florida's largest social service agency and provides a wide variety of programs and services in the areas of Child Welfare, Economic Self-Sufficiency, Substance Abuse and Mental Health, and Adult Services. DCF has adopted as its mission to “Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency.” DCF’s vision is to be recognized as a world class social services system, delivering valued services to its customers. Employees are committed to providing a level and quality of service they would want for their own families.

The Citizen Review Team met with the following members of DCF on Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup> 2006: Lucy Hadi, Secretary, Don Winstead, Deputy Secretary, Steve Holmes, Chief of Staff, Greg Keller, Assistant Secretary for Operations, Melissa Jaacks, Assistant Secretary for Administration, Ken Decerchio, Assistant Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health, and Kim Brock, Chief Information Officer.

In addition, members of our review team have met with several stakeholder groups including: Florida Coalition for Children, Community Based Care Lead Agencies, Community Mental Health Providers, Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and DCF District employees.

#### **Structure**

DCF’s organizational breakdown shows the Secretary and Deputy Secretary functioning as a team with the Chief of Staff, Assistant Secretaries for Administration, Operations, Substance Abuse and Mental Health and the Chief Information Officer as direct reports. These seven individuals make up the executive leadership team. The Secretary and Deputy Secretary are responsible for strategic direction and planning. The Chief of Staff has responsibility for all program areas except substance abuse and mental health. The Assistant Secretary for operations is responsible for the five (5) regional zones and fourteen (14) district offices. The responsibilities of the other members of the executive leadership team are indicated by title.

The department has 14,817 total positions funded of which 1,121 are vacant leaving 13,696 actual employees. Of those employees, 37 are Senior Management Service, 2,851 are Select Exempt, 10,642 are Career Service, and 1,287 are Other Personnel Services.

The Governor has appointing authority to four advisory boards to DCF, including the Council on Homelessness, the Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation, the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiative, and One Church, One Child, Inc.

## **Operations**

### ***Program Areas***

ACCESS (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency Services)  
The ACCESS Florida Program is responsible for public assistance eligibility determination and ongoing case management of Food Stamps, Temporary Cash Assistance and Medicaid.

#### **Adult Services**

The Adult Services Program serves frail, elderly and disabled adults who are victims or potential victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The Program also supports totally and permanently disabled adults who need assistance to remain in their homes and/or in the community.

#### **Child Care**

The Child Care Services Program Office is responsible for the administration of child care licensing and training throughout Florida. The Program Office formulates policy and enforces laws meant to protect the health and safety of all children in licensed facilities and family day care homes, and provides training to child care providers to enhance the safety and quality of care. The program promotes quality child care for all children, and involves communities and organizations in the development of child care standards to meet the needs of the children and providers through mutual goals and initiatives.

#### **Domestic Violence**

The Domestic Violence Program serves as a clearinghouse on domestic violence information. Through community-based partnerships the office administers and coordinates statewide activities related to the prevention and intervention of domestic violence.

#### **Family Safety**

The Family Safety Program conducts, supervises and administers programs for dependent children and their families including the investigation of reports of abuse and neglect of children and adults. Services are directed toward the following goals:

- The prevention of separation of children from their families.
- The reunification of families who have had children placed in foster homes or institutions.
- The permanent placement of children who cannot be reunited with their families or when reunification would not be in the best interest of the child.

- The protection of dependent children or children alleged to be dependent, including provision of emergency and long-term alternate living arrangements.
- The transition to self-sufficiency for older children who continue to be in foster care as adolescents.

#### Office on Homelessness

The Office on Homelessness is responsible for coordinating resources and programs across all levels of government, and with private providers that serve the homeless. The Office works in conjunction with the Council on Homelessness to develop state policy. The Office also manages targeted state grants to support the implementation of local homeless service continuum of care plans.

#### Refugee Services

Refugee Services assists refugees and entrants in becoming self-sufficient. Refugee Services assists newly-arrived eligible clients in obtaining employment, learning English, acquiring job skills and in dealing with legal or medical difficulties. The program is 100 percent federally-funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement by a grant application process.

#### Substance Abuse

The Substance Abuse Program is responsible for implementing and managing a comprehensive system of care that provides substance abuse prevention, intervention and treatment services to the citizens of Florida. The Program must also identify the treatment needs of Florida citizens through a comprehensive needs assessment and planning process.

#### Mental Health

The Mental Health Program is responsible for administering and managing the state public mental health program and providing a range of mental health services for children and adults statewide.

### ***Budget***

The total budget of DCF has actually gone down from almost \$3.8 billion in 2002/2003 to just under \$3 billion for the current fiscal year. This was accomplished by reduction in workforce in the ACCESS program area and transferring programs dealing with persons with disabilities to the new department in 2005. The main areas of expenditure at DCF are:

- Family Safety with expenditures of \$1,124,001,969
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health with expenditures of \$967,714,872
- ACCESS with expenditures of \$564,186,357

For fiscal year 2007-2008, the Department is requesting 136 new positions and \$136,788,976 in additional funds. Some highlights of the Legislative budget request are:

- \$12,451,861 in General Revenue to address the workload issue for forensic mental health treatment services.

- \$12,300,000 in General Revenue to fund independent living services for youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care.
- \$8,672,996, half in General Revenue and half in trust fund, to fund the continued development of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Service (SACWIS) computer system

***Pending contracts and key events timeline***

The Department of Children and Family Services administers over 1,000 individual contracts with the bulk of funds going to providers in the program areas of Substance Abuse, Mental Health and Family Safety. The following contracts require action in the near term:

- 12/31/06 – Need to procure data brokering services for ACCESS Florida staff. Services are currently provided by ChoicePoint, Inc. Data brokering services provide access to public records databases for determination and fraud prevention investigations.
- 12/31/06 – Need to procure child abuse prevention services. Services currently provided by the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, Inc. Services include child abuse prevention campaign.
- 1/1/2007 – Need to procure Florida Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) teams. Teams will be required to deliver community treatment, rehabilitation and support services to persons with psychiatric disabilities who have not been adequately served.
- 3/1/07 – Need to procure fiscal agent for Self Directed Care (SDC) program. The fiscal agent will provide all fiscal and accounting services to support SDC programs in DCF districts four and eight.

***Mechanisms for facilitating communication between DCF and stakeholders***

The Department of Children and Families has a number of mechanisms in place to provide opportunities for citizen and provider input. During the past two years, DCF customers and stakeholders have been invited to participate in the Department’s strategic planning meetings. Additionally, the Department solicits input through surveys, working groups, councils, advisory bodies and communication with contract providers.

***Accountability Measures***

The Department has developed a Strategic Plan that outlines the Department's broad three-year objectives, success indicators and strategies that address the people they serve and the results they want for them at the state level. Additionally, DCF has developed a Business Plan that is the Department's specific one-year state-level plan that outlines the challenges they face and the steps they will take to meet the department's vision of becoming a world-class social services agency. The accountability measures are tracked and displayed for agency and public use in a web-enabled application called the Performance Dashboard.

***Shared mission with other state agencies***

DCF works in conjunction with several other agencies to address responsibilities that rest with the agency. Among those are: Department of Education, Agency for Workforce Innovation, AHCA, Elder Affairs, Revenue, Juvenile Justice, and Health.

***Relevant federal law/partnerships***

The Department of Children and Family Services primary partner at the federal level is the Department of Health and Human Services. DCF also receives grants or has periodic interaction with several other federal agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Social Security Administration and some offices that are part of the Executive Office of the President or the White House.

***Reports due to be issued in the next 12 months***

The Department operates in a highly regulated environment and is subject to federal and state law, rule and policy. Accordingly, the Department is required to submit a multitude of reports to federal entities, the Governor and Legislature of the State of Florida. These reports deal with various operating aspects of the Department's programs.

***Legislative Priorities***

The Department is in the preliminary stages of evaluating the need for legislation affecting DCF's programs outside of the budget priorities discussed earlier.

***Past Successes***

The Department can lay claim to many successes over the last few years. Two of the most notable are Community Based Care and the ACCESS program.

**Community Based Care (CBC)**

CBC is a comprehensive transformation of Florida's child welfare system that combines outsourcing of foster care and related services to competent service agencies, with increased local ownership of service delivery and design. Under the leadership of Governor Bush and with the full support of the Legislature, the Department is working in partnership with local communities to strengthen our ability to support families and better protect our most vulnerable children. Services are provided by not-for-profit Lead Agencies that develop and manage comprehensive, community-based networks of providers who are equipped to deliver all services and supports to meet the needs of child victims and their families. Florida has an opportunity to become a national leader in child welfare through its CBC approach.

**ACCESS**

ACCESS (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self Sufficiency) is Florida's redesigned and modernized service delivery system for eligibility determination in public assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Stamps, and Medicaid). The model is streamlined, cost efficient and utilizes technological advancements. ACCESS Florida is nationally recognized for excellence in innovation. It is supported by technology and powered by partnerships.

## **Disappointments**

### HomeSafenet

The Department has been working since 1994 to develop a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Service (SACWIS) computer system. The name given to this system was HomeSafenet. From 1994 to 1999, the Department attempted to develop a turn key system internally. In 1999, the Department modified this approach and began acting as the systems integrator but hiring outside vendors to accomplish some tasks. In 2002, the Department decided to procure an outside vendor to be the systems integrator but work at its direction. This procurement was posted for bidding, awarded, protested, and all bids were rejected over the next three years. To date, over \$160 million has been spent to develop and operate HomeSafenet. Although some usable applications had been developed over the years, in 2005 the Department made the decision that HomeSafenet would not accomplish all the functionality needed in a SACWIS computer system. The Department is now developing the Florida Safe Families Network to satisfy its SACWIS needs and expects the first phase of the system to be deployed in March of 2007.

## **The Next Four Years**

### *Immediate or Short Term concerns*

#### Forensic Waiting List

The Department is required to provide mental health assessment, evaluation, and treatment to individuals committed for involuntary treatment, following adjudication as incompetent to proceed at any stage of a criminal proceeding or not guilty by reason of insanity. The current rate of involuntary commitments exceeds the ability to admit individuals to a mental health treatment facility.

#### Aged or Disabled Adult (ADA) Medicaid Waiver

The Aged or Disabled Adults Home and Community Based Services Waiver program provides case management and other services to low income adults ages 18 to 59, who are permanently disabled, meet nursing home eligibility, and are generally ineligible for services from other state departments and programs. A significant backlog exists in this program.

#### Sexually Violent Predator Program

The program has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of referrals received, resulting in a significant workload demand and the need for more screenings and face-to-face evaluations. Additionally, as commitments to the Florida Civil Commitment Center increase, additional bed capacity needs arise given that the discharge rate does not counter the admission rate.

#### Missing Children

The majority of children missing from out-of-home care in Florida, and nationally, are adolescents who have voluntarily run away. The State of Florida and its contracted community-based care providers are focusing efforts to identify and address factors that contribute to children running away from out-of-home care.

### Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care

Not all children are reunified or adopted – many reach age 18 without a successful permanent outcome. These children need the skills and assistance to live independently. Adequate funding is essential and is a DCF legislative priority.

### CBC Pilot Projects

The CBC providers in Miami-Dade/Monroe and Broward counties have achieved pilot status to allow for a more innovative service delivery system for child welfare services. The department and its partner Lead Agencies expect greater flexibility in the delivery of child welfare and related services and increased value in independent oversight.

### Florida Safe Families Network

Florida has refocused its approach to full implementation of SACWIS through procurement of a qualified and experienced systems integrator. The goal is to leverage and enhance both the technical platform and functionality to support the department's primary objective of ensuring better services to the at-risk families and children of Florida.

### Food Stamp Payment Accuracy

The extraordinary workload created by the aftermath of the Hurricanes Dennis and Wilma, as well as the influx of evacuees following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, required the redirection of resources from the regular food stamp program. This contributed to a food stamp error rate of 9.37 percent during the first quarter of the federal fiscal year.

### ***Team recommendations for Consideration***

The following comments and suggestions have been developed after countless hours of interviews with stakeholders and DCF employees by team members. There is no way to include every good idea or thought that was expressed during the time this report was being developed. What follows is a collection of recommendations we think are important to be considered.

### **Agency-wide**

1. The executive leadership team of DCF must embrace the concept of cooperation with its community based providers in all program areas and drive this attitude down through every level of the organization. The belief that “if our contract providers don’t succeed, DCF doesn’t succeed,” must be gospel throughout the entire agency.
2. In order to operate DCF more efficiently, the following steps should be taken:
  - Stakeholders in all program areas point to inefficiencies in dealing with multiple and duplicative monitoring and quality assurance efforts. DCF should contract for the development and/or review of efficient and accountable monitoring systems for all program areas, outsource those monitoring functions, and direct any savings down to the community level and into direct service provision.
  - Transfer all Adult Services programs for adults over 60, with the exception of Protective Investigations, to Elder Affairs. DCF should explore pilot programs with local law enforcement agencies to take over adult protective investigations.
  - Transfer child care regulatory functions into the Agency for Workforce Innovation and eventually into the Department of Education.

- Consolidate the current program delivery structure of Central office, zones and district offices to minimize micromanagement, maximize community provider flexibility, and increase efficiency, while ensuring accountability for program outcomes.
3. The role, mission and program offerings of DCF are not well understood even by those who use the services of the Department. The Department has attempted to inform Floridians of their services, and those who advocate for the public seem to be well informed, but those who directly benefit from the services appear unaware of additional options available from the State. For example, a wealth of information is available on the agency web site, but many of those needing these services are unlikely to possess a home computer. A comprehensive review of communication and education efforts should be conducted and an action plan developed to address this weakness. A Citizen Services Unit that would allow customers to interact directly with the agency should be considered.
  4. DCF must make a significant investment in information technology in order to accomplish the mission of the agency. The following steps should be taken:
    - Develop a high level information system to serve the needs of state workers, and community partners that aggregates all relevant data from every state agency and contract provider on children and families who are served by the state in a way that removes barriers created by agency, funding, and programmatic stovepipes. This system should allow real time data sharing between stakeholders and reduce the need for duplication of data entry.
    - Continue the upgrade to the Florida Safe Families Network. Although much has been spent on the HomeSafenet system, this new upgrade will solve many of the problems and help serve the needs of the child welfare system.
    - Provide funds to upgrade computer systems in use by the department so that they are vendor supported and not obsolete.

### ***Family Safety***

5. DCF must truly commit to the realization of the goals of privatization/outsourcing child welfare as intended by the Legislature. This commitment encompasses:
  - Working as collegially and cooperatively as possible with the CBC Lead Agencies and others, in furtherance of the Governor-elect's demonstrated commitment to work in good faith with others on behalf of the citizens of Florida.
  - Creating a working relationship characterized by transparency and mutual support for the purpose of establishing Florida as a national leader in child welfare.
  - Maximizing the scope of outsourcing to the CBC Lead Agency community by supporting the inclusion of Child Welfare Legal Services, Revenue Maximization, and Eligibility Determination, all to the extent consistent with DCF's ultimate responsibility for the welfare of each dependent child.
  - Transferring child protective investigations to willing county law enforcement agencies
  - Facilitating the inclusion of all districts in the 2006 Pilot Legislation that currently applies only to Miami-Dade, Monroe and Broward Counties not later than 2008.
  - Enabling and ensuring the flow of Federal funds to the CBC Lead Agencies.

- Ensuring that the resources freed up by DCF consolidation/downsizing as a result of outsourcing flow to the CBC Lead Agencies as intended by the Legislature.
  - Continuing innovations in support of best practices.
6. The Governor-elect's position in support of elevating the concept of adoptions is laudable and requires the support of DCF and the state government as a whole. In furtherance of this position, it should be understood that:
- There is an ongoing need to identify adoptive parents for dependent children who live in Florida under the protection of the child welfare system.
  - Subsidies and incentives to promote adoption should focus on the adoption of children who live in Florida under the protection of the child welfare system.
  - Reunification of children with their biological parents is also a valid goal to which DCF and the statewide system of care are committed alongside the goal of adoption.
  - Many children age out of the system of care rather than being adopted or reunified – providing adequate financial and transitional support to these children as they attempt to become fully functional, productive young adults is critical.

With the above understanding, the state should:

- Improve service to those families seeking to adopt. The adoption process should become simpler and easier to navigate for families willing to adopt by providing complete information in a way that is easy to access and use.
  - Promote adoptions through a statewide public service campaign.
  - Convene a task force of legal stakeholders and experts to review existing adoption law and procedures in order to recommend changes that would make the adoptive process operate more effectively.
7. Use the new Child Advocate position in the Office of the Governor to convene a Children's Cabinet of DCF, DJJ, DOH, AHCA, DOE, CBC lead agencies and other similar stakeholders to improve cross system planning and coordination. A Children's Cabinet would serve as a focal point for developing comprehensive solutions effectively utilizing the resources from across state government.
8. Enhanced prevention services will strengthen Florida's families and lessen the need for government involvement. Programs such as Healthy Families should be expanded and the state should fully support, fund and implement the Road to Independence (RTI) also known as the Independent Living Program. This would include:
- Ensuring all eligible transitioning youth should receive the maximum stipend.
  - Revisiting the current needs assessment to ensure that the maximum stipend amount reflects the true cost of living amount.
  - Extending RTI benefits to young adults who are attending school part-time and working part-time.
  - Ensuring that transitioning youth are given priority status for affordable housing opportunities.

## ***Domestic Violence***

9. The FDLE recently released statistics that reflected an overall 25% increase in murders with an alarming 47% increase in domestic violence homicides. The increase in domestic violence homicides is, in large part, the reason for the overall increase in murders.
  - Increase prevention efforts by establishing a statewide prevention task force comprised of representatives of DOE, DOH, FDLE, DCF, domestic violence centers, AWI, and other respective organizations to create a five-year plan to decrease domestic violence homicides.
  - Invest in prevention programs (such as the Cut Out Domestic Violence program created by Attorney General Crist) that reach women prior to needing emergency shelter.
  - Create a statewide Fatality Review Team that is responsible for reviewing domestic violence homicides and determining point of contacts where errors occurred or areas that can be strengthened.
  - Continue to fund domestic violence intervention services.

## ***Substance Abuse and Mental Health***

10. As detailed in the February 2006 OPPAGA report, the Department should move to the use of managing entities to administer substance abuse and mental health services. This would introduce managed care into state funded substance abuse and mental health programs that are not Medicaid-eligible while working toward achieving integrated systems of care responsive to local priorities.
11. Retain the Office of Drug Control as a high priority in the Governor's office and maintain the existing authority behind that office. This office should remain focused on substance abuse reduction, continuing the downward trend in adolescent substance abuse, and keeping the public engaged in the fight against drugs.
12. A cost of living adjustment, similar to the annual increase for state employees, should be built into the contracting process and funded. It is critical to keep up with the cost of service delivery in order to avoid a workforce crisis in substance abuse and mental health. Fewer individuals are interested in employment in these areas as a result of low salaries and lack of an adequate career ladder. High turnover results in diminished client care outcomes and additional costs for recruiting and training new employees.
13. Florida should allow integrated crisis stabilization/addictions receiving facilities for adults with co-occurring mental illnesses and addiction disorders. Many people admitted to crisis stabilization units and addictions receiving facilities have co-occurring disorders but cannot be treated for both in the same facility. As a result, individuals with co-occurring disorders generally must be sent to a second treatment facility to be served. This disrupts continuity of treatment and results in duplication in the costs of screening, evaluation and other services.