



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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## Initiatives To Improve Child Welfare Outcomes

by Lynn Marble

The public and private sectors are intensifying efforts to ensure that child welfare services result in positive outcomes for children and families. Two catalysts are spurring these efforts: (1) the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-80), which requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop outcome measures to rate the performance of State child welfare programs;<sup>1</sup> and (2) the growing use of managed care principles (including fiscal accountability) by child welfare services.

### Highlights of Outcome Initiatives

In light of these developments, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has published a document that describes a variety of initiatives to measure the effectiveness of child welfare services. *Outcome Initiatives in Child Welfare* describes 38 recent initiatives in 6 categories: CWLA, national organizations, universities, States, counties and cities, and individual agencies. The publication is not a comprehensive catalog of initiatives; rather, it provides an overview of activities taking place at different levels of the child welfare system and provides liaison contact information for the initiatives described. This Fact Sheet highlights some of the efforts featured in *Outcome Initiatives*.

### CWLA Initiatives

CWLA has several ongoing research projects that are tracking the outcomes of children and youth in residential placement, foster care, group care, and kinship care. CWLA's Child Welfare National Data Analysis System, the Nation's first comprehensive and interactive child welfare database, was announced in May 1999 and is the subject of an upcoming OJJDP Fact Sheet. CWLA's Managed Care Institute has several initiatives that promote best practices for children's services in a managed care environment.

### National Initiatives

A number of national organizations are facilitating dialog, developing guidelines, and providing training related to outcome measurement. The American Humane Association and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators sponsor national roundtables on outcome measures in child welfare services. The Casey Outcomes and Decision Making Project, undertaken by the Casey Family Program and the Annie E. Casey Foundation in partnership with the American Humane Association, the American Bar Association's Center for Children and the Law, and the Institute for Human Services Management, is developing tools that will help agencies adopt a managed care approach to child welfare service delivery. *Outcome Initiatives* also describes activities undertaken by the American Public Human Services Association, the Corporation for Standards and Outcomes, the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration.

### University-Based Initiatives

Several universities are developing, tracking, and researching child welfare outcomes and promoting implementation of management based on outcomes/results. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago created the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive, which provides longitudinal data on all children in out-of-home placement in selected States. The Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is conducting a national study of States' outcomes-related initiatives and is publishing a resource guide based on study findings. *Outcome Initiatives* also describes projects at Harvard University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Kansas.

### State Initiatives

Many States have been tracking outcomes for their child welfare systems since the 1970's, largely in response to demands from State legislatures and requirements in child welfare-related

<sup>1</sup> HHS published its final outcome measures in the August 20, 1999, issue of the *Federal Register*.

lawsuits. *Outcome Initiatives* outlines activities in Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas.<sup>2</sup>

In 1992, Colorado formed a group of private and public sector representatives to develop an outcome model; the State is testing the model in six pilot counties. Kansas has begun to privatize most of its child welfare services, using performance-based contracts. Massachusetts recently created "Commonworks," a network of approximately 150 organizations providing services for abused/neglected youth. Michigan convened 70 focus groups with more than 1,000 participants (judges, State employees, children, and others) to identify and rank outcomes for child welfare services. The Minnesota "Milestones" initiative will collect data to track the State's child welfare performance over the next 30 years.

In 1995, Ohio implemented the Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation Quality Assurance System, which tracks child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and provides regular data collection, analysis, and feedback. Oklahoma, the first State to implement the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), has made extensive progress in linking the system to measurable outcomes. Under legislative mandate, Oregon identified eight outcomes for its child welfare services and defined strategies, services, and measures for each outcome. In Pennsylvania, a task group of public and private State and county representatives used a consensus-building approach to develop a child welfare system plan that stresses results-based management. The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services is using a "children's services simulation model" to integrate baseline data, evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery, and predict outcomes.

## County and City Initiatives

Counties and cities have made significant reforms in their child welfare systems by implementing outcome- and performance-based management. For example, New York City, NY, began a

comprehensive reform initiative in 1996 with a plan that specified concrete strategies for reorganizing the City's protective, preventive, and foster care services; in June 1998, the City released a status report on the first phase of the initiative, during which 15 outcome and performance indicators were tracked. *Outcome Initiatives* also describes projects in Baltimore City, MD; District Four, FL; El Paso County, CO; and Santa Clara County, CA.

## Agency-Based Initiatives

*Outcome Initiatives* also summarizes programs and outcome measurement strategies and criteria of four private sector agencies providing child welfare services. Boysville of Michigan, Inc., Clinton, MI, is a Catholic-oriented, nonprofit agency that offers residential and community-based programs for youth and families. The Casey Family Program in Seattle, WA, serves children requiring long-term foster care. St. Christopher's, Inc., in Dobbs Ferry, NY, is a multiservice agency with a family-focused approach to service delivery and outcome measurement. Youth Villages in Memphis, TN, uses a continuum-of-care model emphasizing clear outcome criteria and cost effectiveness.

## For Further Information

Copies of *Outcome Initiatives for Child Welfare* are available for \$14.95 from the Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 440 First Street NW., Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085; e-mail books@cwla.org.

For additional information, contact Amy Gordon, Research Associate, Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 440 First Street NW., Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085; 202-662-4288 (phone), 202-638-4004 (fax), agordon@cwla.org (e-mail) or visit the CWLA Web site at www.cwla.org.

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*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

<sup>2</sup> As a result of legislative requirements, all 50 States will have outcome tracking systems. The States highlighted are only examples.

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