

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY



Open Government Report 2014

Mayor's Order 2014-170 seeks to institutionalize a culture of transparent and open government and accountability and to expand opportunities for resident participation and collaboration. This report describes how the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has developed and enhanced transparency, public participation, and collaboration and will continue to do so.

CFSA is one of several District Government agencies that make up the local human services safety net. CFSA addresses the social issue of child abuse/neglect, serving as a first responder to protect child victims and those at risk and to assist families in circumstances ranging from struggling to in crisis. A small segment of District residents have direct experience with CFSA; the larger population has high expectations for prevention of child tragedies. At the same time, CFSA has an obligation to advocate for those we serve with the community. Having a child welfare safety net at full strength depends on community members stepping up to report child abuse and neglect, provide homes for children in need of foster care and adoption, and help prepare older youth in care for adulthood. CFSA's relationship with the public involves performing to meet client needs and public expectations while also engaging the larger community on behalf of District children and youth in need.

Transparency

On Line

CFSA's official website (www.cfsa.dc.gov) prominently addresses areas of child welfare of most interest to the public: how to [report](#) child abuse/neglect, [foster or adopt](#) a child, or [donate](#) to children and youth in care. Among the wealth of information on line are:

- An overview of CFSA [functions](#).
- A searchable database of all CFSA [policies](#) regarding child welfare functions, programs, and services.
- Current information about CFSA [performance](#).
- An "[Ask the Director](#)" link for public comments or queries.
- A direct link to CFSA's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) officer.

CFSA is on Twitter at #DCCFSA, where the Director periodically reports activities and retweets child welfare information of general interest. CFSA also maintains a [blog](#) that chronicles our journey to make best practices in treating child trauma the basis of local child welfare practice.

Public Information

CFSA's Office of Public Information (OPI) at 202-442-6180 routinely responds to queries from the media and general public. Among typical requests from the public are:

- Students of social work seeking information for course assignments.

- Local non-profit organizations in need of child welfare statistics to complete grant proposals or inform strategic planning.
- Community organizations wanting speakers on child welfare topics.
- Child welfare practitioners, both domestic and foreign, interested in visiting CFSA to learn about our use of best practices.

OPI freely responds to any queries that fall within the vast body of child welfare information that is not confidential.

FOIA

CFSA receives approximately 16 requests a year under the Freedom of Information Act, mostly via email (cfsa.foia@dc.gov) and through the District's FOIAXpress system. For each request, CFSA's Office of the General Counsel (OGC) determines whether CFSA has the desired information and whether it is unrestricted or requires redaction. The OGC works with each requestor to provide as much information as possible within mandated time frames.

Availability of Data

The Office of the City Administrator (OCA) and Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) are identifying a significant number of District Government agency datasets to publish online later this year. If they do not select a dataset from CFSA to be part of the 2014 release, we will continue to work with them to identify datasets appropriate to publish in 2015. In the future, the Chief Data Officer will provide requirements for open data reporting.

Public Engagement and Participation

Identifying Stakeholders

Like all child welfare agencies, CFSA has six key stakeholder groups:

- Clients—District children, youth, and families receiving services.
- Partners/Providers—Other local public and private agencies that make up the child welfare safety net; foster, adoptive, and kinship parents.
- Oversight Authorities—Local and federal (including Federal Court).
- Advocates—Non-profit organizations pushing for positive change on behalf of children and youth.
- General Public.
- Employees.

Traditionally, the greatest interest in children welfare stems from the local child-serving community of partners/providers, oversight authorities, and advocates. To communicate with this strong core of stakeholders, CFSA:

- Holds regular meetings and/or periodic briefings to exchange information.
- Maintains and uses listservs to announce news, service changes, and other information of interest and to seek input on rules and regulations.
- Has one-on-one discussions as needed to address individual concerns.

As a leader in the local child-serving community, CFSA maintains open lines of communication with partners/providers, oversight authorities, and advocates. We regularly seek their input and participation, and they freely volunteer opinions, raise issues, or give feedback.

Public Participation

Citizen Review Panel: In 1996, the U.S. Congress amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to require that states establish Citizen Review Panels. They are supposed to evaluate state child welfare agencies and recommend improvements. In 2005, the District passed legislation (DC Code § 4-1303.51) to establish a local Citizen Review Panel (CRP) in keeping with CAPTA requirements. The District CRP has 15 members, eight appointed by the Mayor and seven by District Council resolution, who serve staggered three-year terms. Panel members must be District residents and cannot be District Government employees. CFSA serves as staff to the CRP. The group elects its own Chair from among the members and submits an annual report to the Mayor.

Mayor's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect: Mayor's Order 2012-164 established the Mayor's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (MCCAN) to advise on child welfare services. The Mayor appoints up to 11 non-governmental members for staggered three-year terms. The Mayor also appoints additional members from 10 specific DC Government agencies who serve at his/her pleasure. The Mayor selects a Chair from the non-governmental members and a Vice-Chair from the governmental group. CFSA serves as staff.

Internal Child Fatality Review Committee: CFSA's Internal Child Fatality Review Committee meets monthly to review the deaths of children, youth, and young adults who have died within four years of involvement with CFSA. The CFSA Director appoints one community member who serves at the Director's pleasure.

Public Engagement

District residents have ongoing opportunities to get involved and join CFSA in serving people in need in our community.

Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruitment/Retention: CFSA is always interested in licensing more foster homes in the District. The orientation and training District residents need to get a foster care license are ongoing throughout the year. CFSA emphasizes recruitment of foster homes because in the long run, that also leads to adoptions. More than 60 per cent of adoptions of District children from the public system are by foster parents. CFSA conducts continuous outreach to keep the need for foster/adoptive homes on the public radar. Some key strategies include:

- Paid advertising on radio about twice a year.
- Paid advertising in selected District-based movie theaters.
- A website (www.adoptdckids.org) dedicated to adoption from the District public child welfare system.

Partners for Kids in Care: This CFSA program accepts donations of goods and services from the public on behalf of District children and youth in foster care. The program coordinates

opportunities for the public to provide holiday food baskets and gifts and to assist young people in foster care with back-to-school supplies, clothing for prom and graduation events, household necessities when they go to college or transition out of care, and more. The 14-member PKC board is composed of business, organizational, and community donors committed to supporting District children and youth in care.

Opportunities

In FY 2015, CFSA looks forward to:

- Stepping up recruitment of foster homes in the District via stronger overall outreach, especially via social media.
- Periodically targeting organizations and groups that need to know about CFSA's online [training for mandated reporters](#) (professionals required by law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse/neglect in the District).
- Building our Twitter following.

Collaboration

CFSA has two notable collaborations in keeping the public informed.

- We participate in www.adoptuskids.org, the national photo listing of children available for adoption through the domestic public child welfare system. It is sponsored under a grant from the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- The [Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments](#) (COG) acts as a regional partner with the District and nine surrounding jurisdictions in recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive homes. For example, through sponsorship from the Dave Thomas Foundation, COG coordinates with local NBC affiliate WRC-TV 4 to produce the weekly ["Wednesday's Child"](#) news segment that features children available for adoption from local public child welfare systems. For more than two decades, WRC News Anchor Barbara Harrison has hosted this feature, which keeps adoption in front of the public and has led to permanent homes for hundreds of children.