

CYFD Steering Committee

Themes from Focus Groups

(Facilitator Draft)

Charge of the Steering Committee: Take an informed measure of the child welfare system in New Mexico, then use those insights to help CYFD enhance the delivery of services to state's children and families.

The Steering Committee is charged with finding ways for CYFD to respond to concerns our clients and constituents have raised, without bogging down its ability to serve them in unnecessary and cumbersome layers of bureaucracy.

This document categorizes the input provided by participants in the numerous Focus Groups into themes. The full Focus Group comments can be found in the document prepared by Carl Ayers.

This document has been created by Julia Barnes, a facilitator on the project, to group similar comments together from the larger document. Some comments have been shortened or re-organized. There may be other ways to group like-comments other than as presented here. ***This document is intended to be an aid to the Steering Committee, not the definitive categorization or synthesis of the comments for any formal purpose.***

Contents

Overarching Themes	4
1. Potential outcomes that CYFD might adopt as targets.....	4
2. Use data to inform outcomes	5
3. There could be value in an oversight organization, like an Ombudsman office or an SCAC with increased authority.....	5
4. Communication can be improved.....	6
5. Improve resources and referral line.	6
6. Improve pay and work conditions for CYFD workers so they stay.	7
7. CYFD should be reorganized, and it should follow its policies	9
8. Funding	10
9. Change the Culture.	10
Courts and CCIC.....	11
1. Better organization in legal cases is possible.....	11
2. Some models have worked, like ICWA Court.	12
Schools, Advocates and Community Support.....	13
1. Communication to the schools can be improved.	13
2. Hold Family Centered Meetings to bring everyone to the table including the school.....	13
3. Improve response time from Statewide Central Intake.	14
4. Address school attendance issues for children in the system.	15
5. Create a training entity and focus on trainings like impacts of trauma.	15
Resource, Support and Guardianship	17
1. Relationship with, and trainings for, families can be improved.	17
Parents	18
1. Clear Due Process is needed.	18
2. Set procedures should be established and always followed.	19
Multi-Disciplinary Team/Children Advocacy Center.....	20
1. Strong supervisory teams and leadership participation in MD process is key.	20
2. Strong Forensic Interview process and coordination is important.....	20
3. Safety tool needs to be reworked and used consistently.....	21
4. Training is an issue.	21
Native Families.....	23

Overarching Recommendations

1. Need extensive Nation, tribe and pueblo involvement, recruit families and place native children with native families.....	23
2. Consider the financial hardships and give stipends.....	23
3. Investigate dual licensing, but consider differences in various Nations, tribes and pueblos.....	24
4. Address cultural training issues and ensure children are introduced to their own culture.....	24
5. Need consistent decision-making on common issues.....	25
CYFD Staff.....	26
1. Lack of staffing impacts everything.....	26
2. Building rapport with youth is key and training is needed on this.....	26
3. Improve grievance and appeal process.....	26
4. Training must be consistent.....	28
Youth with Lived Experience.....	29
1. It is hard to get heard by CYFD.....	29
Culture Change/ Retaliation Subgroup.....	30

Overarching Themes

1. Potential outcomes that CYFD might adopt as targets
 - a. Increased retention rate of workers.
 - i. Get staff to come to work for CYFD and pay a stipend to get them to stay.
 - b. Increased retention rate of attorneys.
 - c. Increased retention rate of resource parents.
 - d. Increasing the number of foster parents.
 - i. Changing how we interact with foster parents so they feel they are valued and treated professionally. Getting this information out publicly about foster parents.
 - e. 25% reduction in the number of times that child changes placements
 - f. Improved overall performance on our CFSR
 - g. Focus on getting New Mexico up from 50th on child well-being
 - h. Lowering the % of cases that we see recidivism in CPS and then reunification. Also seeing reduction JPO.
 - i. More attendance at MDT meetings
 - j. Minimizing repeat maltreatment. Maybe 6-months, but maybe out a little longer than that.
 - k. Placing sibling groups together. Sometimes that is not always that helpful. Are they getting better in the homes they are going into?
 - l. Fantastic we are starting these steering committees, but these should have started years ago. We were supposed to have the higher ups come and visit their local CYFD and the CACs at least quarterly and they don't ever see the leadership coming through. Super grateful the discussion is happening.
 - m. 10% reduction in the number of staff leaving
 - n. 10% increase in the number of staff being hired into the agency
 - o. Fewer valid constituent complaints. There needs to be a review of all the complaints from a qualitative perspective. There needs to be someone looking into it. Never heard of anyone doing a QA on constituent complaints.

2. Use data to inform outcomes

- a) Use data to see how improvements are being made. Within the next 90 days, prepare a data snapshot of the systems today:

- #s
- populations
- race/ethnicity
- density maps of resources
- foster homes
- TFC
- RTCs
- mental health facilities
- caseloads
- PPWs.

Then open up RAI revalidation and look at racial disparities annually, especially on the Juvenile justice side.

- b) Make data available on the number of workers, vacancies, etc.
- c) ASFA data is already there, and they need to make use of that data.
- d) Focus on getting the information updated in the CAC system. Maybe consolidating the information in an administrative report, giving them access to information in the system.

3. There could be value in an oversight organization, like an Ombudsman office or an SCAC with increased authority.

- a) CYFD to support the statutory implementation of the SCAC and start non-legislatively with an MOU. Identify checks and balances; ensure CYFD does what it says about placement.
- b) More of an independent outside group that looks at cases that have gone well and those that have gone poorly. The Substitute Care Advisory Council can be leveraged, and they don't see any follow up with the reports they issue once they are written. They have some really good things that have worked well. If we are going to keep this council, there needs to be teeth in it for accountability.
- c) CYFD did have a Citizen Review Board, but this doesn't really work the same now. They have had several different iterations of reviewing cases over the years.
- d) When there is a grievance, they take them to the same agency they are having the grievance with. They need an independent resource to look at these issues and not having it is a major issue.

- e) We need an Ombudsman in the state. This is a huge resource for foster parents and for parents. CASA is there, but it only goes so far.
- f) Vetoing the Ombudsman was a slap in the face for families.
- g) Things need to change in the children's Code to address the issues around voicing concerns and the retaliation that comes from voicing those concerns.
- h) There is no outside entity for concerns or grievances.
- i) Grievance process should really be outside of CYFD in order for this to be effective.

4. Communication can be improved.

- a) Let families know what their rights are when they come in contact with the system.
- b) Take what has happened on the protective services side during the last year and ensure that carries over in Juvenile Justice.
- c) Get a director hired on the Juvenile Justice side.
- d) Have a process for getting information that is not just through an IPRA request.
- e) Team meetings should include all of the team around the family from the beginning and throughout the process.
- f) Everything should be on the CYFD website. Telephone numbers, data, legislative reports. CYFD used to put out a monthly/quarterly newsletter that was a strong communication tool and needs to be reinstated. Update the website to make it easier to navigate.
- g) Explain PIG process, update the name and explain it to people for when a new law happens and is implemented.
- h) Need to make the policies and procedures more similar to One Source.
- i) Have outreach outside of Albuquerque into the rural areas.
- j) CCIC is not necessarily the right person. Needs a dedicated person on behalf of CYFD that can be their connection.
- k) Statewide celebration for children who are graduating high school, other states have done this.

5. Improve resources and referral line.

- a) Providing resources and then actually following up to ensure that services have been provided and what services they are receiving. This forces them to be reactive and bring the provider into those meetings in a reactionary fashion instead of being proactive to avoid these situations.
- b) Resource and referral line where individuals are actually knowledgeable about the resources that are available to the families.

- c) Recently the relationship with LCA has transitioned to where it has become quite adversarial. It can take 12-16 weeks to get anything back from them and their response is that we need a response by 5:00 PM on Monday.
- d) Make resources available more quickly. Ex: family needed daycare, there were all these barriers to getting daycare due to lack of license, birth certificates, etc.
- e) Not enough resources for the moms and dads or they don't provide the services to rehab the families they serve. Ex: with one of their moms, they really aren't getting the guidance that they need.
- f) Need more resources in the community. Don't just provide them a list of services.
- g) There are challenges with getting resources and responses from the post adoption unit. Has address changes, lack of Medicaid cards, etc. Nobody in the post-adoption world will contact them back from CYFD. There is no post-adoption support from inside the agency.
- h) Training needs to be provided to the resource parents if they are going to be teaching an abusive parent how to parent. Wants to be a resource and in contact with a mother on a daily basis.
- i) Leadership committee for the local foster and adoption committee. They maintain a foster pantry that has some items for foster families that are just beginning. They have monthly support meetings. They have reached out to CYFD to be some sort of a bridge. There is a huge opportunity for CYFD to connect with the support group, but they really aren't taking advantage of the opportunities. CYFD just needs to engage. There is a fear that foster families working together could create a challenge to CYFD.
- j) Needs to be a database that is kept where foster parents can see children who are available and they can express their interest. Foster parents could take care of the type of placements that best meet the needs of their families.
- k) Real focus on the importance of services. Ex: foster parents who have determined the child doesn't need services and they just stop taking them. There is no commitment to continue following the service plan. There has to be a real commitment and push on their end. It takes a lot of work to get the kids in, get all of their information and getting them into their CACs for mental health assessments and make a plan and there is no holding the family to the agreed plan.

6. Improve pay and work conditions for CYFD workers so they stay.

- a) CYFD needs to provide higher salaries and more flexible options for salary raises for employees to be rewarded for their good work, create opportunities for

them to stay longer in their career. They are so overworked and overstressed from the workload they do would be a huge help. Missing out on high quality candidates. Compensation package is an opportunity to explore.

- b) The COM position is absolutely the most pivotal position in the entire state for the local leadership that makes the difference in child safety. A good COM changes the game. A bad one is really hard.
- c) Create measurable goals in the timelines that need to be created to address the changes that they have made and measuring their progress. Kevin S. settlement is a huge opportunity to set these metrics and monitoring.
- d) Need to release the timeline with what they plan to change within 3-months, 6-months, etc. This will show that they have some initial strategy for change. In the first 3-months, do a policy change, start changing leadership, a wage increase for staff. Timelines are the only way to hold them accountable for their mismanagement.
- e) QABI five elements is a great way that they could use. CMS already uses this process, and this happens in Nursing Homes and each office should have their own QABI plan.
- f) The new workers in CYFD don't have the skills to meet the needs of the high acuity kids they have, and they run rings around them.
- g) The turnover is huge. The only person still on her case is her father's attorney after 4 years.
- h) Need to be more intentional about how we are hiring staff and not just hiring them to fill positions. They need to be supported and if the job doesn't fit for them, we need to invest in keeping them inside the agency.
- i) More time investing in trying to keep staff and when a worker says they are leaving, they need to be encouraged to keep them inside the agency instead of just accepting they are leaving.
- j) Supervisory piece is important. Linked to the Collaborative Safety work and how important supervision is to keeping staff so they don't leave.
- k) When new employees get to the 6-month mark, survey them about how they are feeling, are they getting what they need and what can we do to support them.
- l) We need to survey staff to see what they actually know about the grievance/constituent complaint process, then address areas as needed and then re-assess later.

7. CYFD should be reorganized, and it should follow its policies

- a) CYFD needs to be several different entities. Resource one side, adoption on one side, protective services one side.
- b) Consistency and uniformity in the application of the policy needs to be a priority.
- c) Follow the 18-24 month to permanency.
- d) CYFD needs to become much more proactive in getting supports for their foster parents. Everything they do is reactive.
- e) They need to be overhauled and restructured.
- f) Cabinet Secretary changing every administration is a huge issue. There is no consistency.
- g) Increase in transparency for how they deal with everyone across the board.
- h) Transparency needs to be addressed. Even as a professional and foster parent, CYFD is just difficult to get information that is needed. Difficult to get in contact with the PPW, supervisor or COM. Not sure what the rules are for documentation for the agency and CYFD is not required to do the same.
- i) Create a process for getting feedback from outside entities on a regular basis. There is a lot of information that is already out there, CYFD is just not using them.
- j) Follow their own procedures and timelines. Seen many times where the child is placed with the foster parent, the child needs to be reunified, the child needs to come back in, and they don't place the child back in the home they were in before. The foster parents have to ask all the questions and CYFD doesn't know the answers to the questions. They treat the children just as if they are numbers.
- k) Making sure that the timelines are followed. This is a huge problem. The attorneys just keep prolonging the case. They are giving the bio parents too many chances. At some point you have to understand that the parents can't do it. The children can't be at the mercy of all the parents chances.
- l) Believe the system that serves native communities is so broken. Believes that putting a series of band aids is not going to work. They really have to take a hard look at their system and ensuring they are abiding by their current policies and procedures. ICWA works if they have support from the tribe and they have to begin with ICWA being present and not updating them after the meetings have occurred. Following their policies and procedures that are necessary and start dismantling those areas that are not working.

8. Funding

- a) Identify another funding source other than just relying on Title IV-E.
- b) Use the funds from the legislature overseen by our Juvenile Justice Advisory Councils.(2 million sitting in this fund.) It is needed and needs to be spent in our communities. CYFD internally, without input from the JJAC board, didn't engage the communities on what they needed and just put limitations on the use of the funding. This needs to be set up for the funding to be used.
- c) More funding for wraparound services for the children who are being served by CYFD. This needs to be expanded to not just the extreme cases.
- d) The RFP and grant process is more streamlined and easier to use. Their willingness to simplify the granting process has been huge. There is some pandemic money that is out there and financial opportunities with federal money.

9. Change the Culture.

- a) Went to CYFD's website and their vision statement is only about children and nothing about families.
- b) Exit interviews for staff, resource parents and providers and track the results.
- c) Culture that has been bred of retaliation, fear and intimidation. Need to know what supervisors, COMs, leadership that have had complaints filed against them.
- d) Educate staff on process for filing a grievance and ensure that it does not stop at the supervisor process. Focused on resource parents having a better grievance process.
- e) Had several situations where staff have come to them asking them to advocate for something that they can't ask for. "I can't advocate for this because they won't let me, I'm afraid I will lose my job"

Courts and CCIC

1. Better organization in legal cases is possible.
 - a) CYFD's legal counsel needs training on the barebones of the law. Other considerations of the law. They need critical training on putting on a case that isn't loaded with hearsay, how to prepare a case for trial.
 - b) CCAs have conflicts and should recuse themselves.
 - c) Seems to be a huge gap between the client/the permanency workers and the council.
 - d) The PPWs are not setting the direction, it is the attorney that is setting the direction. Not seeing the direction of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary playing out in the court.
 - e) CCAs are not preparing for the cases, and this has a detrimental impact on the children and families we serve.
 - f) Department counsel that is not well versed in the delinquency side. The initiatives and work we are doing are much more aligned and really need to focus on crossover youth. Other than filing against those families, we can find other avenues to meet those needs. Need a commitment to build upon the populations that are the same.
 - g) Lack of commitment to policy and procedures and state statutes. These are underused and misused. Change of Placement policy is almost never used correctly. Foster Parent Bill of Rights is never used or used correctly. ACES are acquired, avoided or mitigated. Definitions of Kin aren't adhered too, the 5th Degree is not being followed.
 - h) Kinship Families who don't need to come into the protective services system where there is a voluntary placement agreement and keeping the children safe with relative care and oversight by the department. Really doing the work for children that is one step higher than safety planning and one step lower than dependency. Addressing disproportionality and children and families in care for poverty related issues.
 - i) Need better information regarding resources for CASA advocates around policies and procedures and better relationships with CYFD workers.
 - j) Implement standing meetings with CYFD's managing attorneys as done in Bernalillo. They show up and are committed to attending those standing meetings.

- k) Missed placements/children not placed in the appropriate home in the first place/not given the appropriate information in the beginning. Could potentially create a community led group to help get the right placements.

2. Some models have worked, like ICWA Court.

- a) The cooperation in Bernalillo County in the creation of an ICWA Court. They have been at the table consistently and they have stayed there during the 2 1/2 years. Seen the Dept. make a change to serve the community better.
- b) Built out an Office of Tribal Affairs and a Children's Right Division. They are doing tribal outreach to the 23 Sovereign Nations from the Secretary's Office.
- c) The state's leadership in the State ICWA implementation has been a strength.
- d) Communication between CYFD and between the tribal courts to share information that is needed.
- e) When we purposefully do this work with tribes, we have amazing outcomes, and we need to have the same outcomes for all of our children and families.
- f) Outreach to the tribes. Make site visits to the various tribal courts throughout the state. Improve some of the questions that come up regarding jurisdiction, is it the tribe or CYFD and vice/versa. Questions about resource sharing - knowing what information is available to either the tribe or to CYFD.
- g) Not all 23 tribes are the same and how we do things varies from place to place. Education and training in these areas.

Schools, Advocates and Community Support

1. Communication to the schools can be improved.

- a) The schools don't receive any communication what is occurring with their students in care. The only communication they get is when they need to change bus routes, etc. Ex: of parents not supposed to pick children up and they don't know to not let them go. They have a wonderful system worked out with JPO where they get an update every Monday to have a smoother transition back into school. They have a foster care liaison in their district and this person has tried over and over to get something in place and has been unsuccessful. All of the turnover makes it really difficult.
- b) The decision-making that is made in these cases. CYFD has basically no accountability. The decision needs to be made by the worker and their supervisor and not their attorney. They feel that often times the directive that they can't talk about things is because the attorneys have told the worker not to say anything.
- c) There is a concern that transparency in the department is a real issue within the department. Ex: of the whistleblower report where CYFD was paying the worker and nothing about CYFD's responsibility to address the issues that led to the issue in the first place.
- d) The PPWs are not updating the records and need to address the challenges.

2. Hold Family Centered Meetings to bring everyone to the table including the school.

- a) How all of us can come together to help meet the needs of the kids to keep them from coming back the next year.
- b) There were a couple of Family Centered Meetings. These were last minute meetings and in a couple of these situations, the staff were actually outed for making the report. May lead to more anonymous reporting and fear of reporting. We need to reduce the barriers to reporting.
- c) Real inconsistent participation in treatment team meetings. Decisions regarding medications can't be done and they are left stuck. Often a real failure to meet with the child on at least a monthly basis.
- d) The Safety Assessment tool is not being used as it was designed to be utilized. They go out and do their investigation and then come back in and click whatever needs to be clicked to show it has been done.
- e) CYFD does have a form to notify the schools about youth coming into care, but not used appropriately.

- f) Schools involved in the Family Centered Meetings. They have asked several times to be involved in these meetings but have been unsuccessful.
 - g) When CYFD is working with the family and they are not yet in custody, they have tried to say please don't make another SCI referral and let them work with the family instead of having to do another investigation.
 - h) Building up options that we could build up a trauma responsive system where we can keep children and families from deeper penetration in the system.
3. Improve response time from Statewide Central Intake.
- a) Delayed returned calls from Statewide Central Intake "SCI" is really difficult especially if you have concerns about siblings or families. Ex: situations where caseworkers were giving out their business cards and asking people to call them directly, which is in violation of state law that says they have to report to SCI.
 - b) When we make a SCI referral, we don't get any type of follow up. Ex: made over 40 reports last year and asked for a follow up for each one, and there was never a single one followed up on. Really challenging for mandated reporters when this doesn't occur.
 - c) Wait time to make a SCI referral is excessive. If there is an emergent issue, they don't get the responses due to the queue, there needs to be an emergency way to reach someone immediately that is not law enforcement.
 - d) Ex: called SCI 3 different times to report the same incident with no call backs. Call during the school day and not called back until the next day.
 - e) More responses to reports of neglect. Ex: in one case, this person reported to SCI over 20 times before they did anything about the reports.
 - f) Mandatory reporters need to know how many times they need to make a report, how many more times do I need to call before I get a letter back or I see something going on with resources/services to the families.
 - g) Difficulties with caseworkers updating information especially for those who have in-patient hospitalizations.
 - h) Need to do a better job of getting community input when new programs and changes are coming out.
 - i) Difficulty reaching the child's PPW. They can't reach by phone and then resort to email and even then have to resort to reaching out to others to reach the PPW.

4. Address school attendance issues for children in the system.
 - a) Before COVID, they had a vibrant truancy court, and they ran it about 3 years. Would like to see this come back in the future.
 - b) Have had a big issue in the school district around attendance issues. They didn't even know that they weren't accepting reports on youth 14 and older for educational neglect. This was never communicated. There is a truancy issue and doesn't know what the solution is. Tried to start a weekly meeting with CYFD to attempt and address the concerns including JPO and the schools to discuss some more of their problematic cases. Could potentially stop duplicative referrals and improve communication.
 - c) We have increased absenteeism in the school district. There are multiple red flags in cases for children coming back into the schools from placements and would like to see CYFD prioritize these concerns.
 - d) Need to get the kids back to school would really help.
5. Create a training entity and focus on trainings like impacts of trauma.
 - a) Child Welfare Academy that exists in Anchorage. Likens this to a Police Academy where they train and prepare staff and continuing education. Would never work for CYFD currently due to the fact they can't do their job.
 - b) Specialized training on trauma on how workers can handle challenging conversations.
 - c) Work on retention and training and being youth and kid focused. Trauma informed practice is really hard and intense, there needs to be a lot in place to help them navigate their trauma. Focus on Secondary Vicarious Traumatization.
 - d) It's really important that if the children have been traumatized, most of the times the parents have been traumatized as well.
 - e) Real strengths are in the supervisory role. People live up to their supervision. It is important that we train them, and we aren't training them to be supervisors. The good supervision will make the worker good.
 - f) Workers need to be mentored better, better training and support. They need specialized training. Big safety concern for children in foster care is that teachers don't know what's going on and they don't have the information.
 - g) Always the supervisors who get the training on new programs. Really need workers and supervisors to get trained.

- h) The cases they have seen in the last year are children from birth to age 1. They need specialized training of how to meet their needs. They need more experience in their jobs to learn everything they need.
- i) More internal training for workers to follow state law and procedures and regulations. Sometimes the impression is that "the school" works for them instead of trying to meet them halfway.
- j) More workers would be amazing so that families can get the services they need. If they had more time to actually go and engage and make progress on some of the families they see every year.
- k) Workers need more training, especially in regard to trauma. Children need more input into how decisions are being made about them.

Resource, Support and Guardianship

1. Relationship with, and trainings for, families can be improved.
 - a) The training needs to support the culture that families know what they're doing. CYFD can talk down to families. They are retaliated against. Most of the workers are fresh out of college and haven't parented children.
 - b) Missed opportunities for training. Fidelity and field monitoring around the culture of customer service, culture of respect for resource families.
 - c) Continue to build relationships between resource and foster adoptive families and relationships with the families. They are actively being discouraged by workers where practice, policy and process is not being followed.
 - d) Retention of foster parents isn't encouraged. Foster parents are actively discouraged from getting to know each other.
 - e) Work to get siblings to know each other should be encouraged by the Dept.
 - f) The culture between staff and professional foster parents needs to be addressed. It has been horrific.
 - g) In RAFT training, resource families need an outline of timeframes of when things are expected to occur.
 - h) RAFT needs to include information that every child under 3 qualifies for early intervention services. This should include a document that includes providers who can do these services.
 - i) Resource parents don't have representation. There is no one for them to turn to. Resource parent term needs to be rolled back, but not until they roll out a comprehensive training.
 - j) Really difficult for foster families not having access to legal counsel and it is difficult to get an answer from CYFD. There is really no one to explain to them what is going on.

Parents

1. Clear Due Process is needed.
 - a) Parent Bill of Rights and parents were really clear about what their rights were. The grievance procedure was really clear in how to file a grievance. You have the right as a parent to have your advocate there, but no one knows that. Ex: CYFD telling a family that either let the child go to the grandparent or they would remove their child.
 - b) There is no one that can clearly and concisely explain their rights. It is their right to have access to the report made against them (it is fine to be de-identified).
 - c) Don't have any faith that CYFD will follow any sense of due process in addressing their process.
 - d) It seems that the investigation processes are not being followed like they were several years ago.
 - e) They don't do a good job of sharing information and refuse to share information with parents.
 - f) If CYFD violates the law, they need to be held accountable for breaking the law, committing perjury in court.
 - g) They are held accountable for things they have or haven't done, but CYFD isn't required to do the same things for themselves.
 - h) There is no paper trail on why decisions were made. Had a COM testify in court that there was no documentation in her case for three years.
 - i) Been to constituent affairs and up to the Governor's Office and no one ever does anything.
 - j) Their calls are ignored and if they can get any information, there is always a cost for that information by blaming them.
 - k) This is a never-ending hamster wheel. Understands why parents give up on the department as it appears there is no hope.
 - l) Lack of urgency is a big issue as the system seems to just be ok with just riding along. Children have a finite amount of time, and the sense of urgency needs to change. We aren't dealing with the issues and just passing along to the next generation.
 - m) The system sets you up for failure. It seems that caseworkers are spending time focusing on things that are not important instead of focusing on the issues they should be doing.

2. Set procedures should be established and always followed.
- a) Should be a consistent process of how it is handled when children are removed from the home.
 - b) Should have a consistent process where they are doing an investigation and a Family Centered Meeting that it's always occurring in the same manner.
 - c) There needs to be a system where anyone that is accessing your information, there is a specific login that identifies they have accessed your file on this date at this time. How long did they stay in the file and what did they update in the file. Needs to be monitored by a supervisor or higher authority to ensure they are accessing files they should or getting involved with cases they are professionally asked to be involved with.
 - d) If file information needs to be “deidentified”, then “deidentify” the protected information, but the parent should have the right to review the information about them in the file. Allow the parent to identify discrepancies and correct the errors as noted.
 - e) An online process where you can file the grievance so they can keep track of the grievances filed. They then said that they never received the grievance (this was echoed by multiple persons).
 - f) You shouldn't have to be in the know in order to get anything done.

Multi-Disciplinary Team/Children Advocacy Center

1. Strong supervisory teams and leadership participation in MD process is key.
 - a) Message that the MDT is part of the team, and they need to be going with their advice. They are more experienced than the workers they are seeing.
 - b) You have experts in your community to help you that can help lead. It is just a change in mindset.
 - c) The supervisors and COM are always very responsive, even with the staff turnover. Consistently attend leadership meetings and are a core part of their meetings. They often hear from the CYFD workers to push for the forensic interview
 - d) Have provided training to their Multi – Disciplinary team to better understand their protocols and procedures. They don't always understand why the decisions are made and this has helped.
 - e) Leadership has to communicate that we need to use the MD process in the community to have a better investigation. This all comes from collaboration and must come from leadership. This needs to be normal practice and not an annoyance.
2. Strong Forensic Interview process and coordination is important.
 - a) When they have a forensic interview scheduled, they come to the interview.
 - b) Having investigations fully staffed is important to attend key investigation events.
 - c) There is an opportunity for better training of their staff prior to elevating to those leadership positions.
 - d) A lot of pushback from CYFD on the interview process that they have already agreed to. They are having issues where the workers are refusing to share the information, it's a struggle.
 - e) Lacking the trauma informed approach.
 - f) Their struggle is with the supervisors and their investigators not communicating with law enforcement. Going out assessing for safety and then leaving. Law Enforcement gets these cases 3-4 days later and find out that investigations have been out there.
 - g) Getting those SCI reports. If CACs could have access to the SCI reports themselves, it would be extremely helpful. The CACs are great at identifying which cases need to come in for the forensic interviews. They all know most of

these cases are not going to court and helping identify which cases should be interviewed using the process.

3. Safety tool needs to be reworked and used consistently.

- a) Lack in the safety tool. The way it reads, it could read different to different people. This isn't safe to children and families. Lack of training.
- b) With all the turnover, you have to keep training to understand it. We build relationships and workers are venting there in their offices, but they don't have the leadership and support within their agencies. It starts with COM and their supervisors. This is not keeping the children safe.
- c) Need to go box by box to see what it means. They need to change the wording in the tool and continuous training.
- d) Social Workers are under this pressure to not use the shelter, even if it is the best option for the kiddo. It appears this really isn't an option now instead of being a last resort.
- e) Noticed after the safety tool came out, there was a huge push not to come out of the home. If they do, they are being placed with friends and family members rather than resource families, but the kinship families aren't being provided the resources to meet their needs and then seeing the children re-abused again.
- f) The safety tool is an issue. When they go out and check all of their boxes, they determine safety. When law enforcement gets it, there is a crime that needs to be investigated. The safety tool says the home is safe, but they don't see the home as safe based on law enforcement filing charges. There are cases where they don't call out law enforcement and they don't know why.

4. Training is an issue.

- a) A lot of opportunity for training and support across the whole system. Lack of support go lower end workers. Everyone is lacking the proper support and training. Training for the function inside MD teams. Lack of understanding how traumatic it is to tell their story over and over again. Doesn't know what training exactly is for workers. There is a lack of training on team interaction and how to respond to emails, provide reports. Feels they show up to cases without law enforcement and just don't know how crucial it is to have law enforcement and CACs involved. They are trying to get their jobs done, based on the way they are being taught to do their jobs.
- b) Lack of training is an issue. They try to train them of the importance of a forensic interview; however, they consistently have issues where the workers ask the

children if they are safe in front of their abusers. They have brought this up time and time again, but nothing changes.

- c) Do a pilot in what truly are best practices in a smaller community in the state.
- d) Needs to include their collaborative teams especially when looking at their partners, training rolled out to everyone not just CYFD staff.
- e) The SCI report sharing continues to be an issue. A year ago, CYFD said they would be right on this issue and nothing else has ever happened even after the commitment.

Native Families

1. Need extensive Nation, tribe and pueblo involvement, recruit families and place native children with native families.
 - a) There needs to be a representative from each tribe or pueblo to help navigate the placements. They may take placements that are outside of their tribe, and they need to understand the cultural issues to support each child.
 - b) In NM 10.6% of the population is native, but they are not represented appropriately in their foster care system. There is no reason that they shouldn't have a native placement.
 - c) Take the data from the last five years and figure out how many children need a native placement and recruit the actual number of families to serve the number of children. Target the number of families for every native child. They need to be prepared to share the information on native children across county lines so that they can identify a family immediately.
 - d) CYFD doesn't always call ICWA families when a native child comes into the system. They had openings for four kids (1 Hispanic and 2 white). Knows there are native children who need homes.
 - e) Knowing all the benefits that happen for native children. Certain benefits for native children (Navajo especially). Each chapter with Navajo, CYFD needs to go and recruit native families. Make sure and know who the clan is to not limit to just biological families. CYFD workers really need to be trained on these issues.
 - f) Love to see a commercial from CYFD in we are trying to recruit and retain native foster families during the commercial break for the Denver Broncos. See a billboard on his way to work recruiting families.
2. Consider the financial hardships and give stipends.
 - a) They should consider giving a stipend to native families to recruit and retain native foster homes.
 - b) The stipends are an issue. The Navajo nation sends out \$600 stipend. They sent out a hardship stipend from COVID, and this person just didn't know about it.
 - c) Those who do sign up for ICWA, rarely stay. The pay isn't equitable. They don't take into consideration how far they have to travel. How do we serve native children with native families? Ex: may have to travel 60-miles to the grocery store and they don't take it into account.

3. Investigate dual licensing, but consider differences in various Nations, tribes and pueblos.

- a) On the dual licensing, point is to dual license the family with CYFD and with the tribe. There is an advantage to being approved by the tribe and CYFD.
- b) Do dual licensing for foster parent in Navajo and foster parents. This will allow the placements to occur more quickly. They really don't know what the reasons are that dual licensing isn't occurring.
- c) Crossover would be difficult if any of the other pueblos were making decisions about the Navajo children. How Santa Anna does their ceremonies is completely different than how the Navajo nation does their ceremonies. It is multiples of honoring cultures and ceremonies from each of the tribes. Dual licensing just doesn't work because the tribes are so different.

4. Address cultural training issues and ensure children are introduced to their own culture.

- a) Mentorship is so key. There is nothing unique about cultural sensitivity. We all agree when we take on that child, is that we are going to honor that culture. The challenge with native children is that the information is just not as readily available. Need to have these mentors from each of the 23 tribes.
- b) Navajo - have been doing foster parenting for four years. There should be a mentor for non-ICWA families that get native children. This will help ensure they are following and maintaining and respecting the culture of the children.
- c) Make sure native children are allowed to go to their cultural events and not just making them go to church.
- d) When people use talk about "those Indians". You're looking at systemic racism occurring within CYFD. They don't understand the dynamics of the culture. What people see as bad in one community, they do not see them in the next community.
- e) When you're looking at the Christian component where someone has come from the reservation. This has been difficult on the child when they are trying to give them religion, but not respect their culture. We need to honor the expertise of the native communities.
- f) Training for foster parents. Owls and snakes are bad things. Not only the CYFD needs to know this, but so do the foster parents. Ex: bathing in the first snow, cut their hair.
- g) If the children are coming from the reservation, they are coming from what the outside world sees as poverty. Native families see the riches of the land not in driving a Mercedes or a 5-bedroom house.

- h) There are a lot of things that when you take a child home for the blessing, it is not poverty, but it is the culture. In Navajo nation, you don't look someone in the eye because you don't want to see deep into their soul. Training for someone who knows these things. There are plenty of elders out there who would love to help out the kids.
- i) Agree with the advertisement and reaching out for native families. They need to know who their current foster families are. Their current native families need to be contacted before they contact any family that is not native, even if they don't take the age of the child.
- j) Foster parents need to be considered as fictive kin. Especially after a substantial bond has been established. When a child has come straight from the hospital, that family should be fictive kin and speak up for the child.

5. [Need consistent decision-making on common issues.](#)

- a) Give foster parents a specific definition of exactly what they mean by Best Interests of the Child.
- b) Understanding sexual violence and quit saying it is a custody issue. Heard CYFD say over and over again that custody trumps sexual violence. Really taking it seriously.
- c) Department needs to take a look at are we reunifying above all others or do we want to look at breaking the cycle of abuse/neglect. A very difficult balancing act. The Department has gone too far. This is a decision that needs to be made by the leadership.
- d) Parents need to be held accountable.

CYFD Staff

1. Lack of staffing impacts everything.

- a) Really need our supervisors to be in the role of supervisor and right now they are serving as workers due to staffing issues and just not having the time to do what needs to be done.
- b) So many of these concerns come back to the staffing issues which create some of these issues and concerns.
- c) We really need to do a better job of involving the entire team in the decision making. Ex: of emails coming in and just responding and not consulting the entire team.
- d) Sr. Level leadership to staff communication is still really poor. Staff at the supervisory and community office level don't feel like they are part of the decision-making and they need to be part of the discussion before the decision is made.
- e) Putting out the fires of Kevin S. where they are just putting out fires and just having things pushed down on them.
- f) Not much consideration for the staff. "It feels like a meat grinder, where we just hire them and grind them up."

2. Building rapport with youth is key and training is needed on this.

- a) Rapport building with the youth who will be willing to open up and share those concerns. More focus on building rapport and communication with the children and families we serve and actually implementing the information that comes from the trainings.
- b) Work challenges are really about the communications and how to schedule their time which exacerbates the grievances that arise because they can't spend the time and build the rapport.
- c) Department makes the assumptions that workers know how to build professional rapport.

3. Improve grievance and appeal process.

- a) Sometimes want to speak to someone in person that is not on Zoom. We need to designate someone who is responsible for covering the front if anyone comes in with concerns.
- b) Encouraging those who come to the door and have a concern, we need to work with them about having patience and emphasizing that it needs to be the primary

worker, direct supervisor or the COM. We are not doing good customer service by just throwing anyone out there to talk with them.

- c) We need to do Quality Assurance with our staff who are answering the complaint calls. What information is being shared with the public around the purposes of filing the complaint so it is not weaponized.
- d) Whoever is answering the phone, the information they provide has to be consistent. If it is one step off, it creates issues. That first call should really be listening and gathering information instead of giving information. Consistency in providing information would help a lot.
- e) Consistency in the differing offices. Works with five different offices and they all enforce their policies and procedures, expectations and consistent follow-up with what should happen to correct it.
- f) Streamline the website using IT. Would like to see a one pager of where the constituent can file the grievance and then chose where it goes too.
- g) When we have those families who have called and called and called. The family continues to call constituent complaints, it's a strength that they can respond to the individual. It would be helpful to have someone other than the supervisor or the COM to reiterate the responses instead of just the local office.
- h) For a long time, there were issues with triangulating, saying that's not what the person on the phone said. There is an opportunity for a conference call with the parent, or if they are providing feedback that they do that together and try to prevent the triangulation. This doesn't seem to happen as frequently now.
- i) Echoing that they are trying to prevent triangulation and this has occurred with the provider and the family. Sometimes this is just based on very limited information.
- j) Making it clear that the OIG process is not weaponizing this avenue. We want this to be supportive in taking the information, but they are not the weapon to take action against the worker.
- k) A 2nd level review process for the parents' appeal process. Would love to have an attorney and legal opinion as the next level process.
- l) Internally, legal will often see that a complaint has been made, but they don't see how the complaint was actually resolved.
- m) Need to do a better job of coordinating between legal and program. Program needs to do a better job of looping in legal.

- n) Consistency between office to office. Each county office has a different packet of information they provide to families.
- o) Need a clear construct around what is a substantiated complaint. They have families who move between different offices. The lack of consistency between the offices is creating the constituent complaints. They have had conversations as COMs and investigative groups, region to region and office to office are not consistent. These inconsistencies create many of these constituent complaints.

4. Training must be consistent.

- a) The training really needs to focus on the specific things that need to happen consistently in every agency. Ex: closing cases is not being trained and you have to learn that on the job.
- b) When the supervisor is out, the other supervisor has completely different expectations.
- c) Need to have consistent training. This is a great push for those who are receiving the micro-learnings. What is going to happen when the next workers come in. Some of the complaints from workers as an investigator said this wasn't a danger indicator, but in-home services said that it was. The family sees the inconsistency and this creates issues.

Youth with Lived Experience

1. It is hard to get heard by CYFD.
 - a) Placed in a few shelters at first and then a few foster homes. When they started not liking the placement, they would communicate that they didn't like that placement. The Social Worker wouldn't really setup a meeting to address with the family.
 - b) CYFD does not pay attention to things that are important to the youth, like which school they attend, trips they want to go on, when they want to see their sibling or their parents.
 - c) The youth want to know the facts of why they are in CYFD care and are told that they have to be an adult to know.
 - d) The basic needs of the youth can be ignored, like medication, clothing
 - e) Communication is very important and letting everyone involved in the case to know the next steps and what to expect. If the family is involved and siblings are placed, they should really focus on keeping the siblings together in the same home.
 - f) CYFD workers should know how to work with kids.

Culture Change/ Retaliation Subgroup

- a) Fear of retaliation is on both sides. Biological families and resource parents all worry about retaliation. Need to build a culture where they don't have to worry about retaliation all the time. Feels that CYFD tries to hold all the power.
- b) Retaliation is real and it is very one sided and unethical. Sometimes they just go away and ghost you. They will use you if they need you, but they lack general respect for everything they do to support the children and families they serve. They need to be respected.