



# New Mexico— Focus Groups

August 2022

Carl E. Ayers, MSW  
Sr. Director Strategic  
Consulting

# SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE

casey family programs

SAFECHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVE  
COMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVE  
SUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONG  
FAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDRENSTRONG  
FAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFECHILDREN  
STRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIESSAFE  
CHILDRENSTRONGFAMILIESSUPPORTIVECOMMUNITIES

safe children | strong families | supportive communities

# SOAR Focus Group Process

- All focus groups are being conducted using the SOAR Strategic Planning Process
- Strengths
  - What is working well? What are our assets, capabilities and accomplishments?
- Opportunities
  - What are the opportunities for improvements? What are the external and internal challenges that exist and how do we reframe them for potential action? What new skills are needed to move forward?
- Aspirations
  - Where do we want to see the system in 18-24 months? What would you prioritize we focus on to reach this desired state?
- Results
  - How do we know we are succeeding? What indicators allow us to measure progress towards achieving our goals? What resources are needed?

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- **Strengths**

- We already have a process for constituent complaints that is fair and input has been requested verbally. Employee felt they had been heard in the past.
- Training bureau for staff is virtual and they learned a lot. CEUs to continue their learning. They offer hiring practices and what to look for. Competency improvement, handling issues such as self care and how to handle trauma.
- QA unit is aware of where to connect parents and families when they have a grievance. Youth Bill of Rights is posted in all of the offices, clear that this information is being shared with our youth, they are being made aware of their rights.
- Go over the Bill of Rights with all youth in every home visit. Foster Parents post this bill of rights. Goes over these with the family annually. Foster Parent Bill of Rights, Youth Bill of Rights and the Bio Parents Bill of Rights.

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- ***Opportunities***

- 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.
- Need to focus more on supervisors in making sure this work is occurring.
- 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.
- Department makes the assumptions that workers know how to build professional rapport. Really learned how to build the rapport once they became a supervisor. Need to do this investment with the workforce before becoming a supervisor.
- 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.
- A 2nd level review process for the bio parents appeal process. Would love to have an attorney and legal opinion as the next level process.
- Internally, legal will often see that a complaint has been made, but they don't see how the complaint was actually resolved.
- Working with some of the partners outside the agency to help train staff on how to build rapport. Mentioned All Faiths as one of these.
- Need to do a better job of coordinating between legal and program. Program needs to do a better job of looping in legal.

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- When issues arise further up the chain, it's generally already an issue.
- 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.
- So many of these concerns come back to the staffing issues which create some of these issues and concerns.
- Not much consideration for the staff. "It feels like a meat grinder, where we just hire them and grind them up."
- Putting out the fires of Kevin S. where they are just putting out fires and just having things pushed down on them.

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- ***Aspirations***

- 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.
- Have to address the workforce issues if we really want to make a difference in the complaints and grievance areas.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Communication must go both ways and we need to create a process gather constructive feedback and then act on the information they receive.
- Creating an exit interview process and then actively working on the feedback they would receive.
- Focus on importance of supervision and having that support from your supervisor w/o getting chewed out. Being less punitive and more supportive of staff who are coming into the department.

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- ***Aspirations – cont.***
  - Supervisory piece is important. Linked to the Collaborative Safety work and how important supervision is to keeping staff so they don't leave.
  - 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.
  - 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.

# Focus Group – CYFD Staff #1

- ***Results***

- 10% reduction in the number of staff leaving
- 10% increase in the number of staff being hired into the agency



# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- **Strengths**

- Sandoval County does a great job in responding to constituent complaints and concerns.
- United CCA team - mentioned one person is very involved with the CCIC and making decisions.
- Hearing and experiencing from the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary really and meaningfully listening and feels heard and very hopeful.
- Sec. Vigil is doing an amazing job listening to us. They had a concern this weekend and the Sec. reached back within 24-hours.
- All of the policies are well written and balanced. They seem to be neutral. And are much more accessible than they were.
- They has a ton of respect and hope with Sec. Vigil and Dep. Sec. Gillia. They are doing a great job of active listening.
- 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.
- 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.
- The state's leadership in the State ICWA implementation.
- During meetings they are having now, CYFD will just pop a policy in the chat and making it more accessible. It feels that the fear of sharing this information is lessened.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Strengths – cont.***

- From Bernalillo County, they have a standing meeting with CYFD's two managing attorneys. They show up and are committed to attending those standing meetings.
- Communication between CYFD and between the tribal courts to share information that is needed.
- Access to information is a cultural change inside the department. Up until about a year ago, it was scary the way they were hiding information that should have been available.
- CYFD workers are much more open to hearing the parents concerns and then actually addressing those concerns.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Opportunities***

- Would like to leverage the efforts that have come from State ICWA and tribal work to do other work.
- 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 to, the 5th Degree is not being followed.
- Culture that has been bread of retaliation, fear and intimidation. The Department has done a good job of hiring people to fill these roles who manage this way and it has worked its way up the chain. Feels that we need to clean house with CYFD. Need to know what supervisors, COMs, leadership that have had complaints filed against them.
- Need to make the policies and procedures more similar to One Source.
- Staff don't know about a process for filing a grievance and this has traditionally stopped at the supervisor process. Focused on resource parents having a better grievance process.
- Change in the permanency unit in Bernalillo County in the permanency unit has worked. They really need to move this culture to the protective services side.
- 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.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- There is a critical need to engage communities outside of Albuquerque. We don't have voices from around the state at the leadership table in lifting up the community to help lead the work.
- 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.
- Anytime that we file a grievance now it goes back to CYFD and there isn't an independent group to oversee it. They can't oversee themselves.
- Echoed previous comments. Everything positive that has happened in protective services during the last year has not occurred in Juvenile Justice. The Director position has been vacant for years and because there isn't any leadership other than the internal bureaucrats. Because they haven't put permanent leadership there, there will continue to be an opportunity there.
- When rural communities are shut out of the JJ conversations, the things just stay the same. Ex: PO in the last couple of weeks talking about how there is no future for this child and we just need to lock this person up and treat this person.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- Not all 23 tribes are the same and how we do things varies from place to place. Education and training in these areas.
- The CYFD representatives on CCIC are not necessarily the right person. Needs a dedicated person on behalf of CYFD that can be their connection. This would significantly improve our CFSR. Dedicated person who could coordinate all their joint efforts.
- Postsecondary education recommendations. Statewide celebration for children who are graduating high school, other states have done this.
- Postsecondary education recommendations. Statewide celebration for children who are graduating high school, other states have done this.
- Need better information regarding resources for CASA advocates around policies and procedures and better relationships with CYFD workers.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Aspirations***

- CYFD support the statutory implementation of the SCAC and as a good faith effort would support entering into a MOU that would do the same thing while waiting on the necessary legislative changes.
- SCAC met with some of the judges recently about an informational session about what they do. There is a lot of opportunity in this partnership. Don't know that we need to create a new Ombuds Office, but leveraging the SCAC outside CYFD and has teeth to make sure they follow through. Checks and balances.
- Feels that we need an outside entity to make CYFD do what they say around placements. Title IV-E is an issue and we need to identify another funding source other than just relying on IV-E.
- For retaliation, we should do exit interviews for staff, resource parents, providers. Whether it's an Ombuds or SCAC that can track these exits.
- As much transparency as possible. Make it as easy as possible to access policies and data. Shouldn't have to IPRA every time something is requested.
- Team meetings should include all of the team around the family from the beginning and throughout the process. FCMs happen on the sly and they don't involve the actual team.
- JJ system that acknowledges and understands it has an incredible impact on ethnic disparities. Too many times we don't even look at race. They need to be taught and execute it in person in their practice.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Aspirations – cont.***
  - Protective Services - we really need to look at race other than just tribes. 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.
  - 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.
  - CYFD has PIGs. It would be good that people understood how this process happens when a new law happens and is implemented. PIGs has a negative connotation and the name should be updated.
  - 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. Have seen multiple times where CCAs have conflicts and don't recuse themselves. Seems to be a huge gap between the client/the permanency workers and the council. The PPWs are not setting the direction, it is the attorney that is setting the direction. Not seeing the direction of CYFD leadership playing out in the court.
  - CCAs are not preparing for the cases and this has a detrimental impact on the children and families we serve.

# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- ***Aspirations – cont.***

- JJ side we have a pot of statutorily allocated money in our communities overseen by our Juvenile Justice Advisory Councils. We have in excess of \$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.
- A study being done about how they are getting around the limitations for the Ombuds Office to make this work in the state.
- AECF has a 2020 Leading with Race publication around how we are not supporting those most harmed by our systems. Need outside leadership.



# Focus Group – Courts and CCIC

- **Results**

- Increased retention rate of workers
- Increased retention rate of attorneys
- Increased retention rate of resource parents
- 25% reduction in the number of times that child changes placements
- Improved overall performance on our CFSR
- Suggestions: let's take a data snapshot of our systems today: #s, populations, race/ethnicity, density maps of resources, foster homes, TFC, RTCs, mental health facilities, etc., caseloads, PPWs. On JJ: must be willing to reveal data and not hide it, open up RAI revalidation, let's look at our racial disparities. Let's then look at it every year.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Strengths***

- If you've already developed a relationship with the CYFD worker, they will be responsive through an Email or through a phone call.
- If you know how to navigate there is great information on there.
- Majority of people who work at CYFD care, they want safety and permanency, want to help when they can, their heart is wanting the best thing for our kids
- Have really good success with supervisors. They are usually the easiest to get in touch with and respond the quickest. They are quick to respond, have an answer and are willing to help. Have had occasion to reach out directly to the top and they were immediately responsive and get assistance very quickly. With 10,000 students, the response is very much appreciated.
- Very impressed with the website.
- Have built a relationship with CYFD. Having scheduled regular meetings with supervisors has built collaboration and solving problems before they become big. Responding quickly to their requests and they are reciprocal.
- Supervisors especially in investigations and JPO are very open to new programs.
- A lot of investigators doing a great job of finding resources and connecting to the resources for the families.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Strengths – cont.***

- Relationship is the most important part of working with CYFD.
- Building the relationships between the schools and CYFD are extremely important. Alamogordo has had a high turnover with their staff and they are coming together to meet staff and build the relationship.
- The staff in Santa Fe, any time they've brought concerns to their level, they've been responsive to their concerns.
- Impressed with how staff can have very difficult conversations with families in a dignified and respectful manner.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities***

- We can update the website to make it easier to navigate.
- If the system could let families know what their rights are when they come in contact with the system, a humongous opportunity there.
- A lot of turnover, letting those who work with the families and community know when workers change.
- 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"
- Always the supervisors who get the training on new programs. Really need workers and supervisors to get trained.
- 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.
- Building trust with families by making sure they are aware of their rights.
- Need to do a better job of getting community input when new programs and changes are coming out.



# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- CYFD does have a form to notify the schools about youth coming into care, but not used appropriately.
- Bill of Rights for parents exists, but the notification process is not working.
- 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.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- Very few referrals being made and fewer legal cases. Typically have 35-40 referrals, this year they only have 8. We know poverty is up, mental and behavioral needs are higher and resources are lower. Worried they are behind closed doors and no eyes on them. This person's hope is that the families are getting the services they need, but doesn't know if that is true.
- Delayed returned calls from 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Difficulties with caseworkers updating information especially for those who have in-patient hospitalizations.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- The SW who is the legal guardian of the child doesn't want to have the difficult decisions with the child and want the therapist to deliver that news instead of the worker having that conversation.
- 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.
- 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.



# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Schools involved in the Family Centered Meetings. They have asked several times to be involved in these meetings but have been unsuccessful.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Resource and referral line where individuals are actually knowledgeable about the resources that are available to the families.
- Workers need more training, especially in regards to trauma. Children need more input into how decisions are being made about them.
- One of the reasons we lack foster parents is they are not given the training needed to meet the needs of the youth. Ex: of a youth being moved 32 times in a year. Must be aware of focusing on the children and what they are experiencing.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- 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.
- The PPWs are not updating the records and need to address the challenges.
- ESSA Coordinator that was pulled into the Children's Court side, this person is still struggling to get the PPWs to respond to this person..
- 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.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Aspirations***

- Ex of 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 jobs.
- Make data available on the number of workers, vacancies, etc.
- Get staff to come to work for CYFD and pay a stipend to get them to stay.
- 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.
- Specialized training on trauma on how workers can handle challenging conversations.
- 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.
- It's really important that if the children have been traumatized, most of the times the parents have been traumatized as well.
- 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.

# Focus Group – Schools, Advocates and Community Supports

- ***Aspirations – cont.***

- 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.
- CYFD did have a Citizens Review Board, but this doesn't really work the same now. They have had several different iterations of reviewing cases over the years.
- Need to get the kids back to school would really help.
- Changing how we interact with foster parents. If they feel that they are being valued and treated professionally. Getting this information out publicly about foster parents.



# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- **Strengths**

- Interactions with CYFD workers. They are caring and compassionate in working with this person.. Had one worker that this person sits in with the biological mom and the worker to help make the connection with the mother and this person's daughter.
- As a whole, the workers have been kind and compassionate.
- CYFD wants the feedback and wants to change, they just don't know how to get there.
- As a member of the LGBTQ community, they have been open to being a gay couple and adopting.
- Have seen workers go above and beyond to transport children, which is not their job. Have seen workers step up time and again whenever that part of CYFD is not staffed as appropriate.
- Has been involved with the CYFD system for almost 40 years. Frankly the last 3 years, everything has been pretty horrific. Some of this person's favorite people have left over the last 3 years and people are pretty disillusioned with the system.
- Workers and supervisors really do go above and beyond what their day-to-day jobs call for. Ex: of a supervisor sitting with them in the middle of the night.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities***

- Rehabbing the families they serve. Not enough resources for the moms and dads or they don't provide the services. Ex: with one of their mom's, they really aren't getting the guidance that they need.
- State CYFD and workers realize that this is not their first rodeo. Sometimes they talk down to them. They are 12-years-old and they are teaching them how to parent. This person has been lucky as they tend to leave this person alone. Others are not left alone. They are retaliated against. They are talked down. Most of the workers are fresh out of college and haven't parented children. The training needs to support the culture that families know what they're doing.
- Need more resources in the community. Often saw where the disconnect was for a warm handoff for services with families. Instead of just giving them a list of services.
- Missed opportunities for training. Fidelity and field monitoring around the culture of customer service, culture of respect for resource families.
- 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.
- When staff make up things and a culture of retaliation. Change management has not worked over 15 years.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Resource parent for 2 years and had five or six different workers during that time and 7 different children go through this person's home. "Do as we say, not as we do". This person was belittled by this person's workers who were mostly 20 somethings who has raised this person's children and spent over 20 years being a teacher. Some of the workers were low skill, had questionable integrity, one lied through this person's teeth and was abusive to the child. This person sent this up the chain of command and the worker who did hurtful things to the child was then promoted to a supervisor. The foster parents are held to a different standard. Could cancel meetings at any given time (16 times). CYFD just wants warm bodies to fill their positions and it is just a black hole for staff. The culture between staff and professional foster parents needs to be addressed. Stopped fostering for the agency due to this sickening experience. If they stood up for the children in their care, they would be blacklisted and they turned in their notice.
- Has been involved since 2013 and has two children adopted from CYFD. When there is a grievance, they take them to the same agency they are having the grievance with. Ex: there was a significant issue with the way they were handling this person's case. This person's caseworker and placement worker were both removed due to their concerns with CYFD handling of the case. Their supervisor handled the case and this person was the issue. Took this up the chain to the COM and it was not resolved. They need an independent resource to look at these issues and not having it is a major issue.



# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- 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.
- Don't feel that resource parents are being provided with the resources needed to be a good resource. Wants to be a resource and in contact with a mother on a daily basis. Opportunity to protect foster parents by not requiring every situation that they are a resource, but by providing tools and safety situations to be able and handle those situations when they become unsafe. Need resources to address this and lack of policies and forethought of how to respond to the situation if it goes sideways. Ex: of a bio mom who threatened to burn down the home and had a documented history of arson and mental issue. Ex: of Google Voice number and developing the policies to respond if situations go sideways. Training needs to be provided to the resource parents if they are going to be teaching an abusive parent how to parent.
- Follow the 18-24 month to permanency. Dealing with an aggravated circumstance case. Little to no involvement from the bio family. The judge ordered the parental rights to be terminated in 2020. The judge said that termination should occur within 60 days and it didn't occur until 2021.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Retention of foster parents isn't encouraged because the ones who begin to know the situation and knows how CYFD works, they are encouraged not to foster. Foster parents are actively discouraged from getting to know each other. Had to go through a helluva lot if they would do family centered meetings to let the foster parents get to know each other. That is work they are doing to get siblings to know each other that is not encouraged by the Dept.
- In RAFT training, resource families need an outline of timeframes of when things are expected to occur. CYFD keeps all these things secret and don't share the info.
- 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.
- Need a place for grievances outside of CYFD. They can't fix themselves. They need a place to go.
- Fear of retaliation is on both sides. Biological families and resource parents (really disagrees with the term) 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.
- 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.
- Thinks Resource Parents is a good idea, but they aren't ready for it.
- They aren't seeing enough movement in fixing all their issues.
- CYFD needs to be several different entities. Resource one side, adoption on one side, protective services one side.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Opportunity for CYFD is endless right now. Don't feel they are taking the opportunities right now. Feels that vetoing the Ombudsman was a slap in the face for families. Uses this every day in the Adult world and it is needed. They need to be overhauled and restructured.
- Fact is they are all there for the children. Significant difference between Oklahoma and New Mexico and it is night and day. Don't feel that they are seen as a resource. Retaliation is real.
- 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.
- Retaliation issue is real. this person faced retaliation a couple of years ago due to a situation this person brought up then.
- They've done this many, many times and are the exact same points that they bring up over and over and over again and the actionable items are never acted on. These start to feel like they are a huge waste of time.
- 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.
- 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.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Retaliation is real and it is very one sided and unethical. Sometimes foster parents are in the wrong, but it is very one-sided. In a criminal case, everyone is responsible. In the CYFD world, you don't know what is being used against you. You have 10-days to file, and they don't have any timelines for having to respond. 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.
- Hopes that the Ombudsman can come on to give them some support.
- 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.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- ***Aspirations***

- Need to implement an outside Children's Ombudsman program.
- 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.
- 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.
- Increase in transparency for how they deal with everyone across the board.
- CYFD needs to become much more proactive in getting supports for their foster parents. Everything they do is reactive.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

# Resource, Adoption and Guardianship

- **Results**

- 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. They need to publish items and respond to IPRA requests. We need to capitalize on this opportunity. They have to step up and be transparent and be accountable.
- 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. It's sad they aren't being held accountable by an entity.
- Cabinet Secretary changing every administration is a huge issue. There is no consistency.
- Let's look at other states who are doing better and actually do better. The public has lost confidence in the department. Accept responsibility that they are making mistakes and show how they are making progress.
- ASFA data is already there and they need to make use of that data.



# Parents

- ***Opportunities***

- Don't have any faith that CYFD will follow any sense of due process in addressing their process.
- There is no outside entity to take concerns or grievances too.
- Up until a couple of years ago, it seems that the investigation processes are not being followed like they were several years ago.
- When a grievance was lifted up internally, they lost the paperwork and when he tried to call the workers around the situation, no one ever answered or responded.
- Noted in the last steering committee meeting that there was a fear of retaliation, and they don't know how things can move forward if retaliation is a cultural issue.
- Not aware that the OIG is a resource.
- They don't do a good job of sharing information and refuse to share information with parents.
- Has only seen this person's daughter for three days in the last year. CYFD nor their contractor has any accountability.
- Feels that fathers are an appendage and not necessary.
- Since 2016, not once have they ever offered services to help address this person's situation.
- Doesn't have confidence that the OIGs office will actually do anything about this person's situation.
- If CYFD violates the law, they need to be held accountable for breaking the law, committing perjury in court.



# Parents

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- CYFD goes after the weak and go after the ones that don't know their rights in the law and you don't have any protections at all. They come in and take your kids unlawfully and then they quit their jobs. Then they put them through the court process. They have spent over \$100,000 on this person's court case.
- Making someone pay \$1,000 per month and only getting to see their child once per week. This is more than they draw in a full month. This doesn't give them enough financial stability to live and they always feel like they are on carousel.
- This person was threatened that they were going to take this person's child away.
- There is no due process.
- They don't see the trauma that they cause their parents in the system. "It took me years to be able to sleep".
- The night this person's children were removed, the worker and supervisor didn't think that the children needed to be removed and someone up higher made them come back and remove the children.
- There is no paper trail on why decisions were made. Had a COM testify in court that there was no documentation in this person's case for three years.
- Been to constituent affairs and up to the Governor's Office and no one ever does anything.
- There was a child that died in the foster home that this person's child was in after this person raised concerns and they didn't do anything.

# Parents

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- There was a child that died in the foster home that this person's child was in after this person raised concerns and they didn't do anything.
- The turnover in everyone in this person's case over four years. The only person still on this person's case is this person's father's attorney.
- This person's child actually saw the other foster child in the home who was killed.
- They are held accountable for things they have or haven't done, but CYFD isn't required to do the same things for themselves.
- This person has had three initial hearings and this person doesn't know how they could have three initial hearings.
- All of this is at the expense of this person's children.
- This person has had the agency acknowledge that they messed up three years ago and they just need to move forward.
- Seems that CYFD doesn't follow their own rules and regulations.
- Their calls are ignored and if they can get any information, there is always a cost for that information by blaming them.
- This person's daughter who this person hasn't seen in four years is missing in another state.
- This is a never-ending hamster wheel. Understands why parents give up on the department as it appears there is no hope.
- As a parent, this person has dealt with CYFD on multiple accounts. They put you through the ringer and there is no one that is on your side.

# Parents

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- As a parent, this person has dealt with CYFD on multiple accounts. They put you through the ringer and there is no one that is on your side.
- 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).
- If you're not willing to share documentation with me, then what are you doing that you have to hide it.
- Where is an advocate that is there for them. It is a struggle for them to get up and continue everyday.
- Both of this person's cases were brought up because this person was advocating for this person's child. This person has been doing this for many years. Been given a listing of every service provider in the state and surrounding states. This person doesn't qualify for Medicaid and thus not eligible for the services for a child with special needs.
- Have CYFD come in and telling the mother that they have to take time off work for the interview and can't provide any information on what was reported on them and that this was an unfounded case.
- The process is almost abusive in of itself and it is your character that is being questioned here. This person's child runs into traffic and this person will chase the child and if it causes a bruise on this person's arm, that is not abusive. CYFD is not there when this person's child is tearing up the house and throwing things. This person's child has experienced trauma that was not this person's fault, it was through the schools, and CYFD doesn't investigate the schools when they fail to bring this person's child home.

# Parents

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- This person tells them to go back and look at their prior case and that it was Unfounded. They come at this person again questioning this person's character and this person's dedication to this person's child. As a parent it is hard to not be angry when you have known this person's child for 20-minutes.
- At what point are we going to acknowledge this is everyone's problem and we have to come together to fix it.
- Went to CYFD's website and their vision statement is only about children and nothing about families.
- CYFD will come in and tell the families that the child needs to go outside of the home, but don't give any resources to help with that. They have a shelter where the kids can go for only three weeks and they bounce around place to place.
- Ex: mother was adopting and CYFD did not enter the information in the FACTS system, so when they transitioned to adoption they didn't have Medicaid due to not entering the information in the system.
- Foster parents are not supported in the system either, in addition to parents.
- The only use they ever did was to bring on the Peer Advocate. This person reached out to CYFD and the person looped back to the COM who told this person they knew it was going to happen, so what is the issue.
- CYFD is very punitive and it is cloaked. You can talk to three different workers in three different counties and get three different directions.
- Have families that won't even get on a call because CYFD will take away their resources for lifting their voice and this has happened in the past.

# Parents

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Once the parent exhausted all complaint avenues in Albuquerque, they then reached out to other caseworkers. They don't apply the rules consistently and thus always get different responses.
- This is just a ridiculous process.
- 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.
- Once asked if the entire family was screened for ACES and they have to address the parental trauma they have experienced if they want to address generational issues.
- Lack of transparency is a major issue as well as lack of consistency.
- this person is a good enough parent for this person's youngest child who is in this person's custody, but not for this person's other children. This has caused a lot of delays in this person's son's treatment for autism.
- 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.
- Kids behavior problems are automatically looking at the parents for this as an issue.
- Not getting the needed information from the treatment center.
- This is a broken system from the ground up. What they need is just a little bit of support without judgement and without it circling back on do you have the money.

# Parents

- ***Aspirations***

- Consistency and uniformity in the application of the policy needs to be a priority.
- 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.
- If file information needs to be deidentified, the 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.
- 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).
- Should be a consistent process of how it is handled when children are removed from the home.
- 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.
- Actual procedure on how they remove children.
- 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.







# MD/CAC

- **Strengths**

- Really great social workers that have helped with intake. Getting back to this person within 24-hours. A person helped finalize some paperwork while this person was out on vacation.
- When they have a forensic interview scheduled, they come to the interview.
- Investigations is fully staffed in their local investigations unit. The new supervisor in Roswell gets back to them and along with a social worker attends interviews with this person's workers.
- Hold leadership meetings right before MD team meetings. We do these quarterly, but may change to once a month. Really focused on those hard to serve cases. They start with their leaders instead of calling them out in meetings. Better attendance around that.
- Echo the previous comments. 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. South of Albuquerque.
- County Office Managers make themselves available to have difficult conversations. They return phone calls and are responsive.
- Have provided training to their MD team to better understand their protocols and procedures. They don't always understand why the decisions are made and this has helped.
- Leadership is willing to promote culture change. They aren't defensive, and are willing to accept it needs to change.
- There is some pandemic money that is out there and financial opportunities with federal money.



# MD/CAC

- ***Opportunities***

- There has been a bit of turnover in one county with the COM and each time they have a new COM, they know less, and less, and less about the system. It is like they are starting all over again. This doesn't make sense as these are folks who have risen up through the ranks. There is an opportunity for better training of their staff prior to elevating to those leadership positions.
- Within CYFD, there is a disconnect between the RFPs. Ex: they are asking the CACs to run the MD teams, but their local office is fighting against the MD team joint investigations. Their local office doesn't understand the concept, want the concept. They are starting to get rude and boisterous. They are wanting to do their own investigations and are putting in their ear plugs and blinders when they try to add the other MD perspectives to the system.
- A lot of pushback from CYFD on the interview process that they have already agreed too. They are having issues where the workers are refusing to share the information, is a struggle. Weeks on end trying to run this information down is not helpful. The leadership in San Juan County is not really receptive. Even at the MD Team meetings, there is hostility and finger pointing that is not necessary. Sometimes they just want to them to do a forensic interview that is just asking the same thing they have already asked. Lacking the trauma informed approach.
- Have made a complaint to the COM of the Investigative Supervisor in one county. There has been no formal response to the complaints. In the process of reaching out to the RD and the new COM really doesn't seem to have this person's footing and is just parroting what this person's supervisors are saying.

# MD/CAC

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- As they go through accreditation currently, they have a 65-page protocol that is really unnecessary and they can jointly work together as a solid MD Team.
- Ditto for another county. The COM position is absolutely the most pivotal position in the entire state for the local leadership that makes the difference in child safety. Have had a terrible COM, morale has been down, and children have died and been tortured. What is their role, CYFD is paying them to do the MD Team process and they will not take their recommendations. Hiring the right COM is key; however, they get pulled up to an admin position and they lose them. They need to pay them and then don't give them the flexibility to do the work. They need some financial flexibility to support the work. A good COM changes the game.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

# MD/CAC

- **Opportunities – cont.**

- 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 being taught to do their jobs.
- 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. 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.
- Need to go box by box to see what it means. They need to change the wording in the tool and continuous training.
- Ex: had a case where the child ended up not disclosing on the perpetrator on who they thought was the mom, but disclosed it was the father. Feels the system is working against itself. SCI must be called to open up the new case as a mandated reporter. There was a CYFD worker present, but they had to call SCI and make the report and the worker present just wanted to close the case. Need to recruit staff who understand and are committed to the work. They have to get the right type of person focused on the who did it and that is the end goal. Not focused on just completing the tools. As long as you rely on tools, there are going to be more deaths and more dysfunction.

# MD/CAC

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Outside entities looking at abolishing CYFD, bill last session to remove law enforcement from investigations which they universally disagree.
- Do a pilot in what truly are best practices in a smaller community in the state. What they are doing is not working. Taking law enforcement out of the equation means more children are going to die. Need to do work around supporting young offenders. No services for young males who offend in NM.
- Think with the MD team experience, the bar is set very low for child abuse investigations even being a safe place. Don't know what the solution is, but they know it's an issue in their county.
- There is a lack of resource or foster families. Even when it is pretty obvious the children are being abused in the home, there is no where for them to go or get the services they need.
- Dollars maybe using one time funds or real intense training. All of their staff are required to do national training on why using CAC models are the best practice and why all of this work is necessary. If we had areas of the state that had this highly infused training would be helpful. Just sending the COM to this training, hasn't worked. Has to be bottom to top to effectuate change.
- 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. Ex: the social worker wanted to remove the child, even though there wasn't anywhere else for the children to go, they went back to the family even with them letting the offender back in the home instead of using the shelter. Really concerned that instead of just witnessing the crime, they will be perpetrated against.

# MD/CAC

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Center covers two counties and everything from others is being echoed. Even with them being on a joint schedule, they have investigators from another county is making it difficult as the different CYFD offices aren't practicing the same.
- 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.
- There is a lot of awareness inside the resource family community, but this is just not occurring in the kinship homes.
- One sentence in the safety tool that is terribly worded and maybe it is just as simple as addressing this one sentence.
- Needs to include their collaborative teams especially when looking at their partners, training rolled out to everyone not just CYFD staff.

# MD/CAC

- ***Aspirations***

- 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.
- Leadership have 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.
- 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.
- We have a lot of turnover. This year was 48%. Not something they are proud of, but the pandemic has changed the way we work. The non-profits don't have the funds to keep sending staff to these evidence-based training. These are CYFD's children and they need to fund the trainings and support their staff. They are getting younger therapists and need to be trained on the evidence-based curriculums.
- 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.



# MD/CAC

- ***Aspirations – cont.***

- 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.
- Could help with changing the language on the safety tool.
- There is another workgroup that is focused on the retaliation and the leadership continues to say there is no push to keep children from being placed in foster care, and workers tell you something different. Ex: of 14-year-old who was in a cage and eating this person's own hand because this person was so hungry and they still left the child in the home.
- A person reached out this week about hiring a new COM. What can be done to provide incentives to make it a better job. Higher salary, fund to do what they need. More flexible hours. Supervisors too.
- Message that the MD group is part of the team and they need to be going with their advice. They are more experienced than the workers they are seeing.
- You have experts in your community to help you that can help lead. It is just a change in mindset.



# Native Families

- **Strengths**

- Recently had a placement from one county. They immediately identified a native family. First experience with the ICWA 2nd Judicial court and it was a great experience.
- 2nd the support of a court. They are going in the right direction with a lot of things. They have adopted five native children and they are an ICWA home.
- Really passionate workers who are in charge of the children. They care about the best interests of the children and go out of their way.

# Native Families

- ***Opportunities***

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- They should consider giving a stipend to native families to recruit and retain native foster homes.
- 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.
- 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.
- There are plenty of native families who want to do this work, it just hasn't occurred to them that they need to sign up and support.
- 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.

# Native Families

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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. Ex: they have two native children who the foster parent refers to "those Indian children".
- CYFD just doesn't appear to care what happens to native children. Really consider and prioritize the needs of native children.
- 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. They seem to think they are a pain and they don't want to put forth the effort.
- Make sure native children are allowed to go to their cultural events and not just making them go to church.
- Following 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.
- Saw so many of the great workers who really care have left the agency because the bureaucracy and they are just frustrated. Ex: a child that had been in care for 6-years and the policy is supposed to be 15-months. It is ridiculous that this has occurred. This is the norm instead of the exception.

# Native Families

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Working years and years with CYFD. Agrees that CYFD is not responsive to the ICWA idea. Rarely have enough ICWA people in each reservation, or pueblo. 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.
- So few ICWA people. A whole historical component of working with native children due to history and how children have been treated in the past.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- We need to start training every single CYFD employee so they understand who they are serving.

# Native Families

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- 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.
- 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.
- 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. Feels that CYFD workers see it that way and that is why they take the children. It is really sad that there isn't training out there for CYFD as they need to know all these things. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Consortium that deal with foster care that has representation from each of the tribes and pueblos across New Mexico. There is not a native foster parent on the consortium. Cynthia Chavers is on it internally from CYFD.

# Native Families

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Start having listening sessions for those that have problems with children going to the tribes and the pueblos. There have been times in the past where they have had open meetings, but they weren't really open to hearing the feedback. Doing listening other than just in Bernalillo County.
- When we start looking at pay, we need to look at all of the components, not just the employment component.
- There really isn't a grievance process. They filed a grievance against people inside of CYFD and it went all the way to the top and it just bounces back to the person they are filing the grievance against. They then take it personally and now all of the sudden they are attempting to pull your children and trying to pull your license. There needs to be some type of outside entity to handle these types of grievances. The process now is just causing more bad blood.





# Native Families

- ***Aspirations – cont.***

- Accountability for not following timelines. Ex: child in CYFD for 3 months and they found out that the adjudication that was supposed to have occurred within the first 10 days never occurred. This child went back home because this hadn't occurred.
- 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.
- Give foster parents a specific definition of exactly what they mean by Best Interests of the Child.
- 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.
- 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.
- Bio parents need to be held accountable. They have had 8 children and not one of them has been criminally charged. Every single one of them has been dismissed and out of the 8, 6 of them have gone back.



# CYFD Staff #2

- ***Strengths***

- When there is a constituent complaint, it comes back to the office and we are asked to call the client back and talk with them about it instead of just an upper management decision. Don't feel management thinks that they did something wrong.
- Very flexible and accommodating to schools and work, late nights and weekends.
- We have complaints come into the ICWA unit. We do get back to them and address them fairly quickly. Take the parent seriously. There are some that are constant complainers. They still look into each individual complaint. Have a good relationship with the families they serve.
- Important to have someone to talk to outside of the chain of command. Given them someone to express their concern. There is a specific form that is created and how they can contact the Santa Fe office if needed.
- If this person's office gets a constituent complaint, this person is able to write up the complaint and send it to the constituent complaint office. Kaitlyn Eichers' emails are not accusatory, but ask them to address the complaint and situation.

# CYFD Staff #2

- ***Opportunities***

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Sometimes if the foster parent comes in and makes a complaint against the worker, it is almost like they are accusing the worker and it feels as though you don't have the supervisors backing. It almost feels accusatory.
- The supervisor or COM can reframe how they are sending the requests for clarification and respond. Need to put in the Email that is communicating the concerns in seeking information and moving away from accusatory.
- Sometimes want to speak to someone in person that is not on Zoom. We need to designate someone who is responsible for that. In this person's office, this typically falls to the supervisor who is responsible for covering the front if anyone comes in with concerns.

# CYFD Staff #2

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- They have three different clients who have figured out that they can now go to the OIG's office. They are responding to the same issues that they have had constituent concerns about and actually involve the ERB are interviewing you. This process needs to be explained to the staff, so they know what to expect as this is really scary for the worker.
- 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. How do we best describe this to the public. There are some valid investigations, but not every single one. How do we have the clarity within the agency of what makes it a valid investigation.
- Making sure it is not being used as a weapon against the worker and not creating a hostile work environment.
- 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.
- A lot of the constituent complaints are related to custody cases and are issues they really can't do anything about. The opportunity to talk with SCI about screening in the complaints that are screened in. Could they ask more questions about the reports that are coming in. Opportunities to message what CYFD is here to mandated reporters.

# CYFD Staff #2

- ***Opportunities – cont.***

- Custody cases still have abuse/neglect, but there really weren't concerns until the attorney told them to call in the complaint.
- 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.







# Lived Expertise

- **Strengths**

- I think CYFD did a good job explaining what the exit options are for youth, and what resources are available for those who age out. Really focusing on explaining what all those resources were and the options that we available.
- Never really had many positive experiences during their time with CYFD. They really seemed to do a good job in providing the options for when they age out.
- No strengths in this person's experience.
- Another experience of where they couldn't think of anything they did and said they would do and then followed through with.
- Really doesn't have any good experiences with CYFD. They did have a good social worker. Anytime that they needed help with a job, the social worker would help this person trying to get a job. This person's did an exceptional job of trying to get this person's needs met.
- This person had one really good social worker who tried hard to get this person's in a home and keep this person out of shelters because didn't like them. Some workers just put this person wherever was open and available at the time.
- Sometimes would help with transportation, but this was not consistent and they could not expect to make it to the court hearings.

# Lived Expertise

- ***Opportunities***

- 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. This person would run away from the placement, then placed in a shelter and then placed with another foster home. Had an issue with the next foster home, this person asked for a meeting instead of running away this time and the meeting turned back on this person for not following the rules and then this person ran away. Thought this person took the right approach by asking for the meeting, but when this person got home they just turned on the alarms and watched this person instead of running. This was occurring when this person was a young teenager years old.
- When in CYFD, when this person was placed in one city, the contact with the worker was much more consistent than when he was placed in RTC in another. For 2-3 weeks, this person didn't have any clothes or anything and they didn't seem to care about this. "It was out of sight, out of mind". It took 1-2 weeks to sign off on medications that were needed and no communication with the caseworker. Tried to add relatives or friends to the contact list, it would take 2-3 weeks or a month just to get these things updated. When being placed 100's of miles away, this person felt that this person was less of a priority. Ex: of no shoes in the RTC and socks and is dependent on this person who isn't helping the youth.
- Being more consistent with their communication. Would talk to this person's caseworker for 2-3 months and then not being able to reach this person's worker for months at a time. Making excuses to not answer this person's questions. Ex: the whole situation of why this person was placed in CYFD custody to begin with, but they never told this person why. This person is working with them now trying to get those answered. This person started asking these questions at 16 and they told this person, this person didn't have the right to know until this person was an adult.

# Lived Expertise

- ***Opportunities***

- This person was in a very small school and this person was selected to go on to a trip with all of this person's classmates and all paid for. Was in CYFD custody, they thought it was too far away for this person to do and they rejected it. This really changed this person's entire time in CYFD. Runaways, mental breakdowns all because of this denial. Ex: seeing this person's siblings, this person was in placement for a second time as a teenager, this person wanted to connect with this person's siblings and they kept saying this person couldn't because it was a closed adoption. This person tried to reach out to this person's siblings and did this secretly because CYFD would not approve it. They just weren't willing to help or acknowledge that this person's siblings were helpful to this person. Ex: this person was not able to go to the school of this person's choice. B/c they rejected this person's request to stay in the same school where this person wanted to go when this person entered CYFD. It was super far from the shelter and it went from 9-5 and they didn't believe school lasted until then and the shelter actually listed this person as a runaway as this person was getting there so late from school.

# Lived Expertise

- ***Opportunities***

- This person's SW really never really told This person why this person was taken away from This person home. The SW said that This person's attorney would have to tell This person that information, they told This person that this person would have to wait until 16 and then they told This person that this person would have to wait until this person was 18 and still doesn't have that information. CYFD wouldn't even allow visits inside of their building. This person ended up running away to spend time with This person's mom b/c they would not allow this person to see this person's family, so this person did a lot in behind CYFD's back.
- Was in FC for 2 months (shelter) before being placed in a home. Was set up as with a psychiatrist and to get this person's medications for depression and anxiety, which this person didn't feel like this person had until they put this person on the medication. This person experienced significant mood swings after being placed on the medications. This person was fine once they finally got this person the right medications. It was not appropriate to put this person on medication at 13-years-old. This person has other ways of addressing this person's depression instead of putting this person on medications and now this person isn't really on anything. This person felt suicidal while taking the medications. A lot of the trauma comes from being placed in CYFD.

# Lived Expertise

- ***Aspirations***

- 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.
- If the child wants to have contact with their parent and the parent wants to have contact with the child, CYFD should not have greater authority than the parent to reject that contact. There were many times where the person wanted to talk to this person's dad and this person's dad wanted to talk to the youth and CYFD needs to be held to making sure those contacts occur. CYFD should not have the ultimate decision to stop this contact.
- CYFD needs to communicate and really listen to why they came into care and letting the children talk to their parents if the person want too.
- Feels like if this person would have had visits with this person's mom weekly/bi-weekly like this person was supposed too. Foster families don't generally treat you like your family does. This person's depression and anxiety was most often caused by CYFD. When this person asked for visitation with this person's mom, they would say they didn't think it was the best thing. All the choices they made on this person's behalf, they wouldn't really ask this person. They need to stop assuming they know what the child and family wants because they are not asking them.
- This person's kids are still in foster care. They need to make sure that the kids and the parents are getting their needs met. Daughter is five and this person has a lot of trauma from being placed and services need to be prioritized for the parent and the child.

# Lived Expertise

- ***Aspirations***

- Improving the way they are recruiting staff. It seems that the workers really don't know the process or what to do and they are just messing everything up along the way. Needs to hire staff who have experience working with kids.
- Should prioritize school. Has been to 13 or 14 schools during this person's time with CYFD. This takes a toll on you mentally also. Forces you to have to adjust constantly. Hated public school and this person didn't have a say so in where this person could attend school, i.e. a charter school. This person has now chosen to do online at the charter school and this person is doing well. Public school really created this person's anxiety.
- Get consistent updates on what is going on within CYFD. Maybe just having more Zoom meetings on a regular basis to circle back with them to learn about what happened with their feedback and they would know it is being used.

