The Pennsylvania Task Force on Child Protection, convened by the state legislature in the wake of the Sandusky scandal, recommended sweeping reforms to Pennsylvania’s laws, policies, and practice in order to provide better protection for victims of child abuse. One of their most impactful recommendations was to expand the network of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) so that every victim of sexual abuse in Pennsylvania would be within reach of this national model of multidisciplinary team (MDT) investigation. Task Force Chair David Heckler, the District Attorney of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, asserted that had a Child Advocacy Center been available to Jerry Sandusky’s victims, the abuse would have been discovered sooner and the victimization of many of his victims might have been prevented.

In response to this recommendation, the Pennsylvania General Assembly issued House Resolution No. 45, directing the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to conduct a study on child advocacy centers and team investigations of child abuse in the commonwealth. The Field Center was selected by PCCD to conduct research and make recommendations for the establishment of new CACs.

In order to identify service gaps and resources, and to make recommendations that would best meet the needs of the commonwealth’s child victims, the Field Center gathered and analyzed data from a variety of sources, including the Department of Public Welfare, Pennsylvania CAC Directors, medical stakeholders, the Health Research Services Administration, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, and the United States Census. This data was analyzed using GIS mapping and quantitative and qualitative analysis. The Field Center evaluated five years of child sexual abuse cases across Pennsylvania by location (zipcode), and partnered with the University of Pennsylvania’s Cartographic Modeling lab to utilize spatial optimization mapping through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis.

The methodology included analyzing potential drive times for CPS sexual abuse cases to existing accredited CACs. This initial mapping revealed that a significant number of victims were outside of an hour’s drive of a Child Advocacy Center. The GIS analysis then optimized locations for new CACs so that the majority of child victims as well as MDT members would be within an hour’s drive.

(Continued on page 2)
The Field Center’s research incorporated information from key stakeholders in its recommendations as well as identifying and locating potential resources for CAC services as required by the National Children’s Alliance (NCA) standards of practice. NCA, the national accrediting body for Child Advocacy Centers, has approximately 750 accredited centers under its auspices. Pennsylvania currently has 22 accredited CACs.

In addition to utilizing an in-depth analysis of DPW child welfare data for caseload predictions, the Field Center identified supplemental sources and factors that could contribute to new CAC caseloads. Currently, Pennsylvania’s existing Child Advocacy Center caseloads are comprised of between 11% and 50% of “law enforcement only” cases, those in which, due to definitions of child abuse according to the Child Protective Services Law, fail to fall under the jurisdiction of the child welfare system yet a child is suspected to have been sexually abused nonetheless. Examples of these cases include those in which the alleged perpetrator is not a family or household member. Additionally, cases that are categorized as General Protective Services (GPS) are not counted in DPW data. One such scenario in which a GPS case would benefit from CAC involvement would be when a young child is suspected of being sexually abused by an older sibling under the age of 14.

Changes to current laws may impact what qualifies as a CPS case in the future. As these changes have not yet gone into effect, their impact on CAC caseloads is unknown. In addition, some CACs offer their services to cases of severe physical abuse and/or child victims to violence. Lastly, one significant impact of CACs on a community can be increased confidence in how child victims are served, resulting in increased reports and referrals.

The results of this research and analysis were used to recommend locations for new CACs based on the following criteria:

- A caseload sufficient to maintain the skills of forensic interviewers and medical providers
- Sufficient predicted cases to meet economies of scale
- A reasonable driving distance, determined to be less than one hour, for the majority of families and MDT members
- A local population sufficient to protect the anonymity of the child
- Potential to meet the resource needs of the center

The final recommendations were to establish three types of new Child Advocacy Centers: Regional CACs that will serve two or more counties, Countywide CACs that will serve single counties, and New Affiliations with Existing Accredited CACs, existing CACs that will serve a new county. Due to the flexibility allowed within the standards, it is expected that each new CAC or satellite CAC would complete the accreditation process. The report recommends that each county, regardless of the type of CAC, develop its own MDT to include their county child welfare agency, district attorney, and local police departments. Regional CACs would offer shared resources of infrastructure, forensic interviewing, and medical evaluation. Victim advocacy services and behavioral health treatment would ideally be provided within the community that the child lives but could be centralized if resources dictate.

The Field Center recommended that, in order to meet the needs of child victims of sexual abuse in Pennsylvania, the state should support the establishment of ten new Regional CACs, two new Countywide CACs, and seven new affiliations with existing accredited CACs. The proposed plan is based on quantitative and qualitative data recommendations driven by the best data available. However, CACs are comprised by people, and not data points. It is understood that community stakeholders have expert knowledge of their communities, and that the data alone may not always point to the most reasonable solution. This plan is intended as a starting point so that communities may, to the best of their ability, incorporate the data into their planning.

The Field Center strongly advises that communities invest time in developing their teams, including MDT membership, MOUs to define roles and responsibilities, and policies and protocols, before opening their doors to serve clients. The CAC model is one with great promise, but is only successful if it functions as a collaboration of partners.

To read the completed report please visit the Field Center’s website: www.fieldcenteratpenn.org
The Children’s Bureau reported that, in the 2012 federal fiscal year, there were 397,122 children in foster care, 34% of whom were between the ages of 13 and 20. During the same year, 240,923 children left foster care in the United States. Of those youth exiting care, approximately 24,093, were emancipated, meaning they left foster care when they reached the age of majority or they “aged out.”

As the state or other jurisdiction served as the “parent” for foster youth while they were in care, they should be responsible for preparing them to make the transition to independence if that is their discharge plan. However, data related to youth aging out paint an entirely different picture. For example in Philadelphia, for fiscal year 2012, it was reported that, of the 1,219 children who were 18 years and older and who aged out of foster care, only 180 reported having a permanent residence, 130 said they had a source of income to support him/herself (either employment or public benefits), and 136 stated they had a life connection (defined as the love and emotional support of at least one adult who is committed to their development and individual success).

These data are one example of the national problem that many youth who emancipate from the foster care system exit to homelessness, poverty, and social isolation. In addition to the foster care experience, former foster youth face other difficult social realities such as poor early educational experiences, lack of educational support, and minimal knowledge about post-secondary educational opportunities.

Foster Care Disruptions and Education Outcomes

One of the key contributing factors to the poor educational outcomes experienced by former foster youth is multiple school changes. The Children’s Defense Fund reports that children in foster care have an average of one to two placement changes per year. Based on a study conducted in Chicago among 1,000 black students from kindergarten to seventh grade about educational mobility, it was found that every school placement change resulted in the loss of up to 6 months of educational progress. Disruptions in educational experiences may also contribute, among other factors, to low post-secondary educational attainment for foster youth.

Although youth in foster care report high academic aspirations when juxtaposed with their educational reality, many do not attend college and, of those who attend, few graduate from college. Based on several studies that measured college graduation at different ages, it is reported that only 1 to 11% of foster care youth graduate from college. Understanding that post-secondary educational success is particularly challenging for foster youth, we must ask ourselves, how can youth be better supported in their educational pursuits and what supports do they need to succeed and graduate?

Post-Secondary Educational Outcomes

Higher education is correlated to a “wide range of quality-of-life measures including higher job satisfaction”, increased earning power, higher personal and professional mobility, better health for individuals and their children, increased empowerment, substantially lower rates of reliance on public welfare, lower smoking and incarceration rates, higher self-reports of health quality, increased volunteerism and voting, and increased participation in leisure activities.

One set of studies, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (“the Midwest Study”), has followed a group of youth involved in the foster care system from age 17 to 26. The study tracked the self-sufficiency outcomes of participating youth in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Of the 732 youth interviewed at ages 17-18, 71.3% aspired to graduate from college or get more than a college degree. A later Midwest Study reported that at age 21, only 24% of former foster youth were enrolled in college and only 27.9% had completed one or more years of college without a degree, 1.9% had attained a 2-year college degree, and none of the participants had attained a 4-year college degree. Compared to a group peers in a national representative study, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, former foster youth from the Midwest Study were 6 times less likely to have a post-secondary degree and 9 times less likely to have a degree from a 4 year post-secondary institution.

Understanding that post-secondary educational success is particularly challenging for foster youth, we must ask ourselves, how can youth be better supported in their educational pursuits and what supports do they need to succeed and graduate?

Campus-Based Support Programs

Across the country, several campus-based support programs are helping foster youth succeed in college. One program at Western Michigan University, the Seita Scholars Program, provides its students with a tuition scholarship, which in combination with financial aid and other state funding, allowing foster youth to attend college with minimal or no student loans. In addition to financial aid, the Seita Scholars Program uses a coaching model to support students. Each student has a Campus Coach, a master’s level professional who helps students navigate the campus and tackle any challenges that may arise for the student. The goal of this program is to support students and promote self-sufficiency for long-term educational and career success.

Pragya Verma joined the Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research in September 2013 as a second-year MSW candidate from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice in a macro concentration and is interested in child welfare reform and vulnerable youth services in Philadelphia.

Pragya graduated from The College of New Jersey in May 2011 with a Bachelors of Arts in Psychology and a Management minor. Prior to coming to Penn, Pragya took a year to work as a Support Counselor at a state-wide youth helpline and as a Behavioral Assistant for a social service agency in New Jersey.

As a Penn graduate student, she was involved with the West Philadelphia community and volunteers every Monday evening as a Social Work Coordinator at the free and student-run United Community Clinic in East Parkside. Pragya’s first year placement was at a youth program at Episcopal Community Services. She facilitated a teen-led video project that asked: what does the city of Philadelphia need to know to keep teens safe, housed and educated?

Pragya is especially committed to addressing the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged youth in Philadelphia and is excited about her opportunities at the Field Center. She worked at Project PENN offering resources and referrals to families at the Philadelphia Family Court. Pragya hopes to gain a better understanding of nonprofit leadership and coalition building in order to improve the lives of vulnerable youth through social work practice, policy, and research.
In 2012, an estimated 3.4 million child abuse reports involving approximately 6.3 million children were made in the United States. Although between 2008 and 2012, the overall national rate of child maltreatment declined by 3.3% (from 9.5 to 9.2 per 1,000 children in the population), in 2012 there were 686,000 child victims of abuse. An estimated 399,546 child victims were placed in foster care.²

Theoretically, foster care is intended to serve as a temporary haven for abused and neglected children who cannot safely remain with their families. However, for some children, the journey through foster care can mean instability and the possibility for more abuse and trauma, which has a long-term negative impact on well-being.

Although the Children’s Bureau has consistently stated that the three primary goals of child welfare services are to achieve safety, timely permanency, and child well-being, the system has historically focused on child protection and permanence, but not fully addressed child functioning and development.³ Success in foster care has been evaluated by examining indicators of the first two goals, which are insufficient as outcome measures. It is time to focus on improving child well-being.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy defines well-being as the healthy functioning of children and youth that allows them to be successful throughout childhood and into adulthood.⁴ There is a growing consensus in the child welfare field that child well-being includes dimensions of physical health, mental health, and school functioning.⁵ Nonetheless, several findings indicate poorer levels of well-being and adjustment for children in foster care. Foster children are at significantly higher risk for emotional, behavioral, social, educational, and developmental problems.⁶

Most children in foster care have complex life experiences, and more physical and mental health problems than those in the general population. One national survey comparing children involved in the child welfare system to those living with biological, adoptive or step-parents identified the following factors:

- living with parents in a high-risk environment, found that child welfare involved children had more than double the amount of behavioral, emotional, and physical health problems than the comparison groups.⁶
- Several factors may exacerbate the negative effect of the foster care experience on child well-being, especially in the domain of mental and social health including:
  - loss of significant others
  - disruption of attachment
  - ambiguity when transitioning into foster care
  - poorly trained foster parents
  - lack of effective evaluation and targeted interventions to support child well-being within child welfare agencies.

For many children, lack of clarity about the reason for their foster care placement or the absence of information on the background of the foster family they will be entering can increase the difficulty of transitioning into foster care. Children may blame themselves for the placement and, in some cases, they construe that their personal actions are the main contributing factor even when they are aware that their placement was related to the negative actions of adult caregivers.⁷ One study which interviewed children about the experience of being placed in foster care found that children described being notified about their impending placement as a stressful experience due to feelings of uncertainty and fearfulness.⁷ Children may be confused about the meaning of foster care, concerned about whether they will see their family and friends again, and worried about who they are going to live with. This uncertainty and ambiguity can result in low self-esteem and anxiety or depression and could lead to long-term adverse effects on development and well-being.⁷⁸ Thus, it is suggested that children be provided clarity about foster care either verbally or in an informational package with resources and information.⁷ Providing information about foster care has the potential to minimize children’s ambiguous interpretations during the transition period. Caseworkers should discuss the transition and future planning with children, who one study found prefer to have communication with caseworkers as early as possible about changes that will impact them.⁹

By considering the impact of ambiguity on the emotional well-being of children and taking steps to redress the abrupt transitions that children experience, the system will be closer to improving one aspect of child well-being.

Even when best efforts are made to prepare children for their foster care experience, studies have shown that caseworkers and foster families often do not receive adequate training for the responsibility that caring for children with complex needs requires.¹⁰ Lack of training may make it difficult for caseworkers to access appropriate services and supports on behalf of children and families. On the contrary, one study in Texas that focused on case outcomes for children served by the child welfare system found that social work-degreed caseworkers helped bolster better outcomes for children, measured by marked reduction in the recurrence of child maltreatment and improved stability in foster care.¹¹

Training foster parents also has a positive impact on child outcomes. One study found that foster-parent training that occurred before placement had a decisive impact on all placement outcomes including better placement dispositions, higher foster parents’ rating of the success of placements, shorter placement lengths, and higher percentage of foster parents’ relicensing.¹² Foster parents should obtain training, especially before placement, to help reduce the incidence of undesirable placement outcomes. Since attachment disturbances in early life have a profound impact on interpersonal relationships throughout the life span, it is of the utmost importance to prioritize training and preparation of social workers and foster families as a means to improve placement stability and subsequently child well-being.¹³

(“The Well-Being of Children...” continued on page 6)
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For more information, please contact Field Center Executive Director Debra Schilling Wolfe at (215) 573-5442 or dwolfe@sp2.upenn.edu.
The Field Center is excited to welcome Andrew C. Whitney to their Advisory Board. Mr. Whitney is an Associate at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP where he focuses on litigation and intellectual property. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 2005, where he had the distinct pleasure of participating in the Law School’s Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Clinic. The clinic class, co-taught at the time by two Field Center Faculty Directors, Penn Law Practice Professor Alan Lerner and Dr. Cindy Christian. This experience not only provided Andrew with courtroom experience, but also afforded him the unique opportunity to learn about the complex needs of children in the child welfare system. Mr. Whitney describes his time at the Child Advocacy Clinic as one of the highlights of his law school experience and as a precipitating factor in his continued interest in pro bono work.

Since graduating from law school, Mr. Whitney has maintained an active pro bono practice representing clients in civil rights cases related to prisoner punishment as well as continuing to represent children in child welfare proceedings through the Support Center for Child Advocates. Mr. Whitney has been dramatically impacted by his direct experience with children in the child welfare system, and recognizes that there are thousands of children across the country and in the Philadelphia area who deserve a system that is responsive to their needs. By participating as an Advisory Board member, Mr. Whitney hopes to make a positive impact on the lives of children by supporting the important national work of the Field Center.

Andy Cohen is an attorney at Blank Rome LLP in Philadelphia, and serves on the Field Center’s Young Professionals Council. Andy grew up in the Philadelphia area, and is a graduate of Emory University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He currently lives in Center City with his wife, Blair. At Blank Rome, Andy focuses his practice on employment law, including matters involving discrimination, harassment, protection of company trade secrets, and wage and hour laws. He also serves on the Firm’s Associates Committee and is responsible for advocating Associate interests to firm leadership. Andy has been named a “Rising Star” among Pennsylvania lawyers under the age of 40.

During his time in law school, Andy gained an interest in child advocacy and policy work, and served as a Blank Rome Public Interest Fellow at the Support Center for Child Advocates in the Summer of 2008. Since then, he has continued to focus his pro bono efforts on behalf of abused and neglected children, including child victim witnesses and children navigating the dependency system. In late 2013, Andy won a contested Termination of Parental Rights hearing on behalf of two neglected children, and has continued to remain in touch with the children since their successful adoption.

Through his work with the Field Center, Andy hopes to gain a broader knowledge of the systemic challenges facing the child welfare system, and to help bring about the changes needed to improve it.

Andy Cohen, Esq.  
YPC Profile:

Until recently, measures of child well-being were not operationalized by the child welfare system or included in the regular evaluation of child welfare system performance. A widely accepted conceptual framework of well-being within the ASFA requirements, created by the Administration for Children and Families, recognizes a three-tiered focus, including health (both physical and mental) needs, educational needs, and services to families. Several federal efforts including the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and the Information Memorandum released by ACYF-Promoting Social and Emotional Well Being for Children and Youth Receiving Child Welfare Services and practice initiatives such as Project Broadcast in North Carolina, the Children in Foster Care Medical Home Initiative, and Collaborating to Make Use of Data in Wisconsin have begun to address child well-being. However, measuring child well-being continues to be a challenge since it is fairly difficult to access the data necessary to measure outcomes. Currently, few states have incorporated evaluative measures into administrative databases. Additionally, there is little consensus on what information should be collected. An effective data tracking system needs to be established before child well-being in foster care can be evaluated.

Child well-being is an important factor that the child welfare system must take into consideration when deciding what is in the best interest of children. Action must be taken to minimize ambiguous loss, to provide professional and timely training for caseworkers and foster parents, and to create an effective data tracking system that will provide the child welfare system with a systematic way of measuring child well-being.


(The Well-Being of Children... continued from page 5)
A study by Dworsky and Perez (2010) examined the implementation of ten campus based support programs that exist in different capacities in California and Washington State. Through their investigation, the authors identified six barriers that foster youth face in achieving their post-secondary educational goals, including a lack of encouragement for pursuit of post-secondary education, unpreparedness for college level work, limited or no financial support from his or her family/caregiver, unawareness of financial aid eligibility, mental or behavioral health issues; and existing post-secondary student services do not meet the unique needs of foster care alumni on campuses.

Fostering the Future: The Field Center’s Research Initiative

The educational success of foster youth impacts their future outcomes, making this an issue of importance that must be addressed by the system as well as by institutions of higher education. With the support of a grant from the Philadelphia Foundation, the Field Center is embarking on research to better understand the needs and barriers that foster youth face locally in engaging and succeeding in higher education, identify what resources currently exist at colleges and universities in the Greater Philadelphia area, and determine how to best address the needs of foster youth who are on local campuses. The Field Center has convened a work group of local community and university stakeholders who are interested in collaborating to address this pressing community need.


Newsletter Highlights...

- Access for All: Planning for New Child Advocacy Centers Across Pennsylvania
- Foster Care to College: Helping Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Engage and Succeed in Post-Secondary Education
- Save the Date! 4th Annual Field of Dreams Luncheon