Citizen Foster Care Review Boards play key role in Kentucky’s child welfare system

As a former circuit judge, I have seen firsthand how important Citizen Foster Care Review Boards are to the foster-care system in Kentucky. CFCRB volunteers review the cases of thousands of children who have been removed from their homes due to dependency, neglect and abuse. Recommendations from these volunteers guide judges who must make critical decisions about placing children in safe, permanent homes.

CFCRB volunteers are mandated by statute to regularly review the case of every child during his or her commitment to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. During the past year, 142 review boards conducted more than 20,000 reviews of children in out-of-home care. The Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts provides administrative oversight to this program.

The 2008 CFCRB Annual Report will give you a better understanding of how Kentucky’s child welfare system continues to improve through the use of new technology, new partnerships and new programs. I appreciate the dedicated CFCRB volunteers who care enough to help our children have a bright and promising future.
It is my pleasure to present the 2008 Citizen Foster Care Review Board Annual Report. More than 900 CFCRB volunteers across Kentucky provide a direct service to the judiciary by monitoring children placed in out-of-home care due to dependency, neglect and abuse. Volunteers also offer legislative recommendations to enhance services for children while working to ensure that every child can find a permanent home in a timely manner.

The CFCRB made significant strides in FY 2008:

- The number of CFCRB volunteers increased from 839 in FY 2007 to 937 in FY 2008.
- CFCRB members conducted 20,267 reviews on 9,899 children who were in the custody of or who had been committed to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) due to dependency, neglect and abuse.
- CFCRB members served 972 children through 160 statewide Interested Party Review Board meetings, a 28 percent increase in the number of children reviewed through IPR from FY 2007 to FY 2008.
- The average length of stay for children in foster care was 19.5 months, which is 1.3 months less than in FY 2007. Although the average length of stay continues to decrease each year, older children usually have longer stays in care than younger children do.
- Of the children reviewed by CFCRB volunteers, 44.3 percent were released from care through reunification with their parents or primary caregivers, an increase of 0.7 percent from FY 2007.
- Of the children in out-of-home care, 18.4 percent achieved permanency through adoption in FY 2008. Children who exited care due to a finalized adoption spent an average of 32.8 months in care.
- The 2008 Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 188, allowing circuit court clerks to electronically transmit data on dependency, neglect and abuse cases from the KYCourts II system to CATS, the Children’s Automated Tracking System. This process addresses past inefficiencies regarding data collection, case management and reporting mechanisms.
- Based on discussions between the Administrative Office of the Courts and the CHFS, lists of cases coming up for review are now sent electronically to offices of the Department for Community Based Services. This helps keep case reviews of foster children on schedule.

The Kentucky Court of Justice hosted the first Kentucky Summit on Children in Louisville in August 2007. The Summit attracted nearly 600 attendees, including justices, judges, legislators, attorneys, child welfare and juvenile justice system personnel, advocates, foster parents and service providers.

Following the Summit, which was an immense success, more than 1,300 local professionals attended nine regional summits across the commonwealth. These meetings focused on topics regarding the welfare of children:

- Overcoming barriers to justice.
- Implementing best practices to promote safety, permanency and well-being.
- Understanding parameters while promoting the accountability of courts.
- Identifying at-risk juveniles and the juvenile justice system.
- Combating truancy.
- Developing action plans.

A University of Kentucky School of Social Work report on the outcome of these meetings identified systemic problems with transparency, miscommunication among professionals, lack of resources, inadequate diversion programs.
and competent legal representation. As a result, administrative procedures are being developed regarding dependency, neglect and abuse cases.

The Kentucky Summit on Children had an impact beyond our expectations. Following discussions about transparency of the courts, legislation was introduced in FY 2008 to implement pilot sites that would open up juvenile proceedings to the public. Although the bill did not pass, it opened the door for discussions on a bipartisan level.

Legislation was also filed to address gaps in legal representation for children to ensure that guardians ad litem would be appointed prior to the removal hearing through the termination of parental rights. While the legislation did not pass in 2008, an increase in fees might be reintroduced in a future legislative session. GALs have not received an increase for services since the 1980s.

The legislation also addressed adequate representation for children and families by providing attorneys for indigent parents in termination of parental rights proceedings and appeals. Additional initiatives that deserve mention are the Fayette County Model Court Pilot Project, preparations for the Hardin County Cross Professional Conference in January 2009, the Interstate Placement of Children Assessment, and the ongoing expansion of Family Drug Court and Juvenile Drug Court statewide.

CFCRB State Chair Charlene Greer has played a key role in CFCRB initiatives and accomplishments the past two years. It has been an honor to work with her. Her commitment to enhancing the lives of the children in the commonwealth has been apparent through her work with Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children, the 2009 Advocacy Day and the long hours she has spent promoting the great work of the CFCRB.

Once again, I want to commend the state’s CFCRB volunteers for their selfless devotion to improving the lives of Kentucky’s foster children.

CFCRB MISSION
To ensure safe, permanent, timely placement of Kentucky’s children in out-of-home care.

CFCRB VISION
» With respect to children in care – To ensure adequate and necessary services are provided to families and children with the utmost importance given to safety, well-being and permanency.

» With respect to the judges we serve – To provide timely, accurate and sufficiently detailed information about children in care so as to promote knowledgeable permanency decisions.

» With respect to CFCRB volunteers – To promote awareness and understanding regarding children’s issues through educational opportunities at local, regional and state levels.

» With respect to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services – To provide meaningful, respectful feedback regarding paths to permanency.
Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Boards
2008 Recommendations for Legislative and Policy Reform

Kentucky Revised Statutes 620.320(5) require the Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Boards to evaluate and make annual recommendations to the Supreme Court of Kentucky, the governor and the Legislative Research Commission regarding the laws of the commonwealth and the practices, policies and procedures within the commonwealth affecting permanence for children in out-of-home placement.

1. Continue to increase independent living services for Kentucky’s foster youth, including consistent opportunities statewide. Include better documentation of independent living skills in Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) case files.

2. Ensure the timely implementation by the CHFS of concurrent planning practices statewide and document these practices in case files.

3. Provide accessible drug/alcohol treatment programs for parents whose children are in the custody of the CHFS and ensure compliance with aftercare requirements through Family Drug Court.

4. Increase fees paid to and training for guardians ad litem.

5. Monitor private child-care placements and require these facilities to provide documentation to the CHFS.

6. Advocate increasing the number of foster homes (including therapeutic foster homes) and pre-adoptive homes.

7. Examine timelines under which the CHFS and court system operate regarding parents involved in treatment programs while their children are in CHFS custody.

8. Increase funding to expand CHFS staff and resources, including funding for safe visitation sites.

9. Continue providing funding for education about child protection for all professionals who practice in Juvenile Court and Family Court.

10. Ensure that all efforts are made to keep children in their school districts after they have been removed from the home.

11. Provide funding for and implement electronic filing of court records.

12. Monitor the quality of mental and physical health and educational services provided to children in CHFS custody, especially those who are moved frequently, and include documentation of these services in CHFS case files.

13. Encourage the judiciary and the legislature to be involved in the Citizen Foster Care Review Boards process.

14. Encourage judges, at all court hearings, to clearly state processes and consequences to parents involved in dependency, neglect and abuse cases.

15. Continue to support collaborative efforts between the Judicial Branch and the CHFS.
Out-of-Home Care Demographics

What are the ages of children in foster care?

A: Of the 9,899 children who received reviews by a Citizen Foster Care Review Board in FY 2008, the youngest was nearly 6 months old (0.56 years) and the oldest was nearly 23 years old (22.56 years) due to extended commitment. The average age was 10.26 years. The number of foster children younger than age 5 was 3,240, an increase of 706 from the last fiscal year.

The age analysis is based on children who were in out-of-home care on June 30, 2007, and includes children who were released from custody any time during the fiscal year. Of the children reviewed, 33 were reviewed solely by an Interested Party Review Board and therefore do not appear in the review figures on page 9.

What is the gender of children placed in foster care?

A: The number of males and females in out-of-home care are equal.

What is the race of children in foster care?

A: The children in foster care are 73.8 percent Caucasian, 18.6 percent African-American and 7.5 other.

Time in Out-of-Home Care

What is the average length of stay by age group for children in out-of-home care?

A: Active children – children who were still in care at the end of FY 2008 – experienced an average length of stay of 24.16 months. Inactive children – children released at any time during the fiscal year – experienced an average stay of 14.76 months.

Note: Statistics captured in this chart represent all children whose cases were reviewed between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008. The term “active children” describes children whose cases were reviewed during the fiscal year and who were still in care on June 30, 2008. “Inactive children” describes those whose cases were reviewed during the fiscal year but released prior to June 30, 2008.
The chart illustrates the average length of stay for children by age. Although the overall average length of stay continues to decrease, older children still experience longer stays in care than younger children do.

### Exiting Out-of-Home Care

**For what reasons did children exit from out-of-home care?**

**A:** The CFCRB determined that the majority of children – 44.3 percent – were released from care through reunification with parents or primary caregivers. This is an increase of 0.7 from FY 2007. The chart shows how the other 55.7 percent of children exited care.

**What percentage of children in out-of-home care were adopted?**

**A:** Of children released from out-of-home care, 18.4 percent achieved permanency through adoption in FY 2008. Children who exited care because of a finalized adoption spent 32.8 months in care prior to adoption. The following two charts present the percentage of adoptions and average months to finalize adoptions by fiscal year.

**Note:** The variance in the statistical comparison between FY 2005 and 2006 may be due to the implementation of the Children’s Automated Tracking System (CATS). In FY 2005, the reasons for release were gathered from individual CFCRB case reviews. With CATS in place, the reason for release was obtained primarily though downloads from TWIST, the CHFS data tracking system.
**Placement Stability**

What do fewer out-of-home placements mean for children in foster care?

A: Fewer placements create stability.

In FY 2008, children experienced 3.14 placements per commitment. This is a .47 percent drop from FY 2007 in the average number of placements.

The CHFS is responsible for determining a stable placement for the children in its care by considering the least restrictive and most appropriate placement for each child. The CHFS may change the placement of a child for a variety of reasons, including safety concerns, the need to provide more services and to protect the child.

**Establishing Permanency Goals**

How is the permanency goal established and defined?

A: The CHFS establishes a permanency plan for each child who enters foster care and his or her biological family. The plan is filed with the court and addresses the reason the child is in custody. It is also an action plan for the time the child is in foster care. The chart defines permanency goals that have been established for children.

Children who remain in the custody of the CHFS for 12 months after their initial placement receive a permanency hearing through the local court to determine their future status. At this hearing, the court addresses whether the child should be returned to the parents, placed for adoption, placed with a permanent custodian or provided with another type of permanent living arrangement.
CFCRB Overview

What is the Citizen Foster Care Review Board?

A: The CFCRB provides recommendations to judges on Kentucky’s foster children so that they may be placed in safe, permanent homes. These dependent, neglected and abused children are in the custody of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).

The Kentucky General Assembly created the CFCRB in 1982 to decrease the amount of time children spend in foster care. The CFCRB operates within the Division of Dependent Children’s Services of the Administrative Office of the Courts in Frankfort. The AOC is the operational arm of the Kentucky Court of Justice.

Today there are more than 900 CFCRB volunteers who serve on 142 local boards throughout the state. In FY 2008, volunteers held 1,258 meetings and conducted 20,267 reviews on 9,899 children in out-of-home care.

Who are CFCRB volunteers?

A: CFCRB volunteers give their time and efforts to advocate for dependent, neglected and abused children in their communities. Volunteers have a variety of educational and professional backgrounds and a deep compassion for children. The majority of volunteers are female. The average age of volunteers is 53. The average length of service is 5.2 years.

What are the requirements for becoming a CFCRB volunteer?

A: Those interested in volunteering must complete an initial six-hour training session and consent to a criminal record and central registry check. New volunteers are trained in:

- CHFS and local Department for Community Based Services procedures.
- Dependency, neglect and abuse case forms.
- Court processes.
- Mental health needs of children in out-of-home care.
- Process for conducting a file review.

Once a volunteer has completed this training, a recommendation is made to the chief judge of the local District Court or Family Court for the volunteer to be appointed to the local board. Judges appoint volunteers for three-year terms. Volunteers receive a comprehensive handbook on the program and information on opportunities to earn the required six hours of annual continuing education.

What cases do CFCRB volunteers review? What statute allows members to conduct reviews?

A: Pursuant to KRS 620.270, children and young adults in the temporary custody of the CHFS who are committed as dependent, neglected or abused, regardless of placement, are subject to review by a CFCRB. This includes adults whose commitments are extended, children placed for adoptions that are not finalized and children who are returned home but remain committed. Children and adults originally committed as dependent, neglected or abused but recommitted as status or public offenders are also subject to review, provided the commitment was not interrupted. A District Court or Family Court judge may also issue an order for the CFCRB to review status commitments.
What resources are needed to conduct a review?

A: The CFCRB reviews the case of each child or young adult who is in temporary custody or is committed by the court in the county or counties served by the board. Each CFCRB shall have access to all information and records of the CHFS pertinent to the parents or person exercising custodial control or supervision for the child being reviewed. The board also has access to all pertinent information and records of the court, the CHFS, and public and private child-care facilities for the child the CFCRB is reviewing. Information and records include, but are not limited to, case permanency plans, case progress reports and case records. There are paper reviews and interactive reviews, which are also called Interested Party Reviews.

How often are reviews conducted?

A: The CFCRB may review a case as often as possible, but no less than once every six months. The CFCRB reports its findings to the court and the CHFS.

Where are reviews conducted?

A: The chief District Court or Family Court judge designates the location of the review. Reviews may be conducted at the local Department for Community Based Services office. If the review is not held during regular work hours, the Department for Community Based Services shall arrange access to its office.

Record number of volunteers attend regional trainings

A record number of CFCRB volunteers – 249 – attended nine regional trainings held across Kentucky from July through October 2007. The sites for the nine trainings were Bowling Green, Carter Caves State Resort Park, Highland Heights, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, Lexington, Louisville, Murray, Owensboro and Somerset. The locations were chosen to make the trainings convenient for the volunteers. The regional trainings provided an opportunity for CFCRB volunteers to obtain the required six hours of annual continuing education.

The CFCRB Training and Development Committee developed the training agenda on topics of interest to CFCRB members statewide. Among the topics addressed were Developmental Concerns for Younger Children in Care: Birth to 5 Years of Age, Cultural Awareness and the Effects of Family Drug/Alcohol Addiction on Children in Care. Field coordinators were instrumental in securing presenters and sites and attending the regional trainings. Many community partners served as presenters, such as the CHFS, Head Start, community mental health programs, Drug Court and certified foster parents of medically fragile children.

The Recognition Committee and local judges presented CFCRB members with service awards. They also gave 11 individuals an Outstanding CFCRB Volunteer Award to honor their dedication to the children they serve.
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Interactive reviews on the rise statewide

In FY 2008, 972 children were reviewed via 160 Interested Party Review board meetings and Montgomery and Union counties transitioned from paper to interactive reviews.

IPR is an interactive interview process that involves Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CFCRB) volunteers, parents, care providers, service providers, attorneys and Cabinet for Health and Family Services personnel (CHFS).

Children who are in CHFS custody due to dependency, neglect or abuse can be reviewed through this interactive process. CFCRB volunteers, judges and CHFS staff may refer cases for an IPR and that practice is encouraged. Cases are chosen based on the six-month administrative review schedule.

The 18 IPR boards are comprised of CFCRB volunteers who serve on local boards within regions and who have acquired additional training specific to the IPR process. One board meeting can include up to four cases. The IPR focuses on case plans for parents and children, including the progress being made to secure permanency for the child. Following the interactive review, a field coordinator compiles the IPR board’s findings and recommendations into a thorough report for the judge involved in the case.

Since the inception of the IPR Pilot Project in November 2004, 2,441 children have been reviewed. The 16 IPR regions became operational in October 2006, making the interactive review process available statewide.

Interested Party Review Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barren River</td>
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<td>Purchase</td>
<td>Mayfield</td>
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### Court Improvement Program supports the CFCRB

The Kentucky Court Improvement Program (CIP) continues to support the Citizen Foster Care Review Boards through improved education, an enhanced electronic case management system and the expanded Interested Party Review Program.

In addition to supporting CFCRB volunteers, the CIP has developed other initiatives to promote the safety and well-being of children in foster care:

- Fayette County Model Court Pilot Project
- Preparation for the Hardin County Summit Follow-up Conference (January 2009)
- Education for attorneys, Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) personnel and judicial support staff
- Assessment of Interstate Placement of Children Program (children placed outside of Kentucky)
- Expansion of Family Drug Court and Juvenile Drug Court
- Development of CIP Task Force/Advisory Board
- Continued Collaboration with the CHFS
- Continued expansion of CATS, the Children’s Automated Tracking System
Collaborative efforts between the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services have enabled the CHFS to receive electronic notification about children the Citizen Foster Care Review Boards have selected for review.

The Children’s Automated Tracking System, or CATS, collects and generates names of children who, by statute, are eligible for review and sends this list electronically to the CHFS. Transmitting information electronically eliminates the time and expense of mailing and faxing.

CATS also improves how the AOC is notified when a child enters the foster care system through weekly downloads of information from TWIST, the CHFS data management system. AOC personnel have the ability to view information on any child in the system through TWIST.

The purpose of CATS is to serve as a source of case information for the AOC, the CHFS, judges and local review boards. It also helps the AOC fulfill statutory reporting requirements, pursuant to KRS 620.320, that requires specific information be reported to the legislature, the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the governor on behalf of the CFCRB.

Detailed reports on the outcome of children in foster care have allowed judges and local CHFS offices to enhance services. The recent passage of Senate Bill 188 allows circuit court clerks in all 120 counties to electronically transmit court information on dependency, neglect and abuse cases, which is stored in CATS. This process eliminates the practice of circuit clerks providing paper copies of court forms in DNA cases to the AOC for the review boards.

Using one application to store information from the courts, the CHFS and local review boards is making it possible for these processes to be developed:

- Electronic notification of the next annual permanency review.
- Notification to the court and the CHFS about non-compliant cases, allowing for follow up and possible permanency plan changes.
- Enhanced electronic notification to the courts and the CHFS of discrepancies between court orders and the CHFS’s case file.
- Detailed reports to allow data collected by the CFCRB to be shared with current and future partnerships.

Meanwhile, Court Improvement Program funds are allowing CATS to create a program that will track juvenile court cases and children placed in out-of-home care outside of Kentucky.

In the future, CATS applications may allow users to view information regarding the court status of juvenile cases through a Kentucky Court of Justice statewide tracking system.

The addition of an interstate placement area to the findings and recommendation form will enable data to be collected and stored on children placed in care outside of Kentucky. This will allow an annual assessment of interstate placements of children and ensure that services are being offered and used.

CATS data will highlight areas of DNA proceedings that need improvement, including the timely filing of termination of parental rights petitions, permanency hearings and placement stability.

CATS helps ensure that the case of every child in state custody has the opportunity to be reviewed by the CFCRB and allows for more timely notification of cases for review.
FIELD COORDINATORS

Area 1
Counties: Ballard, Caldwell, Calloway, Carlisle, Christian, Crittenden, Daviess, Fulton, Graves, Henderson, Hickman, Hopkins, Livingston, Lyon, Marshall, McCracken, McLean, Muhlenberg, Todd, Trigg, Union, Webster
Ron McGregor
301 S. 6th St.
Paducah, KY 42003
Phone 866-712-8780 or 270-575-7167
ronmcgregor@kycourts.net

Area 2
Counties: Allen, Barren, Breckinridge, Butler, Cumberland, Edmonson, Grayson, Green, Hancock, Hardin, Hart, LaRue, Logan, Meade, Metcalfe, Monroe, Ohio, Simpson, Taylor, Warren
Tara Metts
IPR Field Coordinator
908 W. Broadway, 11E
Louisville, KY 40203
Phone 502-545-3498 or 502-595-0064
tarametts@kycourts.net
Regions: Jefferson, Shelby, Spencer

Area 3
Counties: Adair, Bell, Casey, Clay, Clinton, Garrard, Harlan, Jackson, Knox, Laurel, Leslie, Lincoln, McCracken, Pulaski, Rockcastle, Russell, Wayne, Whitley
Deb Yates
105 Campbellsville St.
Columbia, KY 42728
Phone 800-207-2178 or 270-384-0854
debyates@kycourts.net

Area 4
Counties: Adair, Bell, Casey, Clay, Clinton, Garrard, Harlan, Jackson, Knox, Laurel, Leslie, Lincoln, McCracken, Pulaski, Rockcastle, Russell, Wayne, Whitley
Amy Smitha
L & N Building
908 W. Broadway, 11E
Louisville, KY 40203
Phone 502-545-3498 or 502-595-0064
amysmitha@kycourts.net

Area 5
Counties: Anderson, Bourbon, Boyle, Bullitt, Fayette, Franklin, Jessamine, Marion, Mercer, Nelson, Scott, Washington, Woodford
Shelli Snellen
Administrative Office of the Courts
100 Millcreek Park
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone 800-928-2350 or 502-573-2350
Fax 502-573-1412
shellsnellen@kycourts.net

Area 6
Counties: Bracken, Boone, Campbell, Carroll, Clark, Estill, Fleming, Gallatin, Grant, Greenup, Harrison, Henry, Kenton, Lewis, Madison, Mason, Montgomery, Nicholas, Oldham, Owen, Pendleton, Powell, Robertson, Trimble
Audrey Sharber
Boone County Justice Center
6025 Rogers Lane, Box 241
Burlington, KY 41005
Phone 859-334-3245 or 859-334-3253
Fax 859-334-3253

Area 7
Counties: Bath, Boyd, Breathitt, Carter, Elliott, Floyd, Johnson, Knott, Lawrence, Lee, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Menifee, Morgan, Owsley, Perry, Pike, Powell, Rowan, Wolfe
Melodie Robinson
Knott County Justice Center
100 Justice Drive, Room 328
Hindman, KY 41822
Phone 606-785-2923 or 888-219-9922
Cell 606-276-9760
melodi Robinson@kycourts.net

INTERESTED PARTY REVIEW FIELD COORDINATORS
Melissa Huffman
IPR Field Coordinator
Barren County Courthouse
400 Courthouse Square
Glasgow, KY 42141
Phone 877-807-3175 or 270-651-1429
melissahuffman@kycourts.net
Regions: Barren River, Green River, Perry, Purchase

Tara Metts
IPR Field Coordinator
908 W. Broadway, 11E
Louisville, KY 40203
Phone 502-545-3498 or 502-595-0064
tarametts@kycourts.net
Regions: Jefferson, KIPDA Rural, Northern Kentucky, Lincoln Trail

Toni Mullins
IPR Field Coordinator
Magoffin County Justice Center
101 E. Maple St., P.O. Box 1388
Salyersville, KY 41465-1388
Phone 877-246-3457 or 606-349-1245
tonimullins@kycourts.net
Regions: Big Sandy, FIVCO, Gateway

Shan Swanner
IPR Field Coordinator
130 S. Maple St.
Somerset, KY 42501
Phone 866-677-4241 or 606-677-4241
shanswanner@kycourts.net
Regions: Bluegrass Rural, Cumberland Valley, Fayette, Lake Cumberland

IPR Administrative Support Staff
Lori Shouse
Eboni Blackford
Christa Ridderikhoff
Administrative Office of the Courts
100 Millcreek Park
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone 800-928-2350 or 502-573-2350
Fax 502-573-1412

Jill Hall
Veronica Cline
Warren County Justice Center
1001 Center St., Suite 108
Bowling Green, KY 42101
Phone 866-551-0040 or 270-746-7168
Fax 270-746-7170

Greta Auter
Theresa Zanchi
Jefferson County Judicial Center
700 West Jefferson St., Suite 220
Louisville, KY 40202
Phone 502-545-8539 or 502-595-0064
Chair
Charlene Greer
cmgreer530@bellsouth.net

Vice Chair
Tom Stevenson
dodgehill72@hotmail.com

Secretary
Rebecca Edmondson
aedmonson4@adelphia.net

Treasurer
Cathy Pippin
cathypippin@kycourts.net

Region 1
Sharon Bush
sharonbush@bellsouth.net

Region 2
Billy Boone
bjoone@alltel.net
June Bell
jbellrcn@aol.com

Region 3
Chuck Rogers
chuckrogers@kycourts.net

Region 4
Joyce Spaulding
Marybeth Stewart
fandmstewart@bellsouth.net

Region 5
Larry Cotton
cottonl@adelphia.net

Region 6
Donna Breeden
drb2942@hotmail.com

Region 7
Robert Meadows
redfan@kih.net

Region 8
David Saier
david.saier@bhsi.com

Training & Development Committee
Shelly Meyer, Chair
ibulk007@gmail.com

Recognition Committee
Karen Phillips
kynutmeg@aol.com

Public Relations Committee
Nathan Goins, Newsletter Editor
nhg421@hotmail.com

Legislative Committee
Larry Perkins, Co-Chair
lbperkins@bellsouth.net
Paula Atkins, Co-Chair
jpatkins@bellsouth.net

Conference Committee & Review Committee
Tom Stevenson, Chair
dodgehill72@hotmail.com

Strategic Planning Committee
Cindy Payne
mustangsindee@gmail.com

Nominating Committee
Paula Atkins, Chair
jpatkins@bellsouth.net

AOC Department of Family and Juvenile Services

Patrick Yewell
Executive Officer
Department of Family and Juvenile Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
100 Millcreek Park, Bldg. 12
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone 800-928-2350, x2133
patrickyewell@kycourts.net

Rachel Bingham
Manager
Department of Family and Juvenile Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
100 Millcreek Park, Bldg. 12
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone 800-928-2350, x2179
rachelbingham@kycourts.net

Dolores Smith
Unit Supervisor
Holbrook Judicial Center
100 E. 2nd St., Room 344
Owensboro, KY 42303
Phone 800-628-0263
or 270-687-7002
Fax 270-687-7071
dolores.smith@kycourts.net

Troy Bell
Field Supervisor
Administrative Office of the Courts
100 Millcreek Park, Bldg. 12
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone 800-928-2350, x2235
Fax 502-573-1412
troybell@kycourts.net

Division of Dependent Children’s Services
Administrative Staff

Conference Committee
Tom Stevenson, Chair
dodgehill72@hotmail.com

Strategic Planning Committee
Cindy Payne
mustangsindee@gmail.com

Nominating Committee
Paula Atkins, Chair
jpatkins@bellsouth.net
The 2008 Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board Annual Report is published by:

Jason M. Nemes, Director, Administrative Office of the Courts
Laurie K. Dudgeon, Deputy Director, Administrative Office of the Courts
Patrick Yewell, Executive Officer, Department of Family and Juvenile Services
Rachel Bingham, Manager, Department of Family and Juvenile Services
Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Boards
100 Millcreek Park, Frankfort, Kentucky 4060
502-573-2350 or 800-928-2350
www.courts.ky.gov

Report compiled by Troy Bell with appreciation to
the Division of Dependent Children’s Services.
Submitted pursuant to Kentucky Revised Statutes 620.320.

Acknowledgment of individuals who helped create this report:
Jennifer S. Collins, Tammy Collins, Michael Ganesan,
Leigh Anne Hiatt, James Hopson, Dee Mabry and Dolores Smith

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Disclaimer on Statistics in this Report
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