



Iowa Department of Human Services

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DHS Engages National Expert for Child Welfare Review Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group will lead effort

(Des Moines) - The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) is engaging The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (CWG) to conduct a broad review of the state's child welfare system.

CWG, a nonprofit technical assistance organization, has been involved in child welfare reforms throughout the country since 1996, conducting evaluations in more than two dozen states. It focuses on system evaluation, crafting effective implementation strategies and strengthening the quality of front-line practice through training and coaching.

"The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group will look at all areas of system functioning, and identify system challenges and potential solutions," said Wendy Rickman, administrator of Adult, Child and Family Services for DHS. "Essentially, they'll be looking for any system barriers so that we can target those areas for improvement." DHS has engaged the non-profit experts following the tragic deaths of two young Iowans who had been adopted from state care.

"We want to do whatever we can to keep children from suffering at the hands of abusers who try to subvert the child protective system and community safety nets," Rickman said. "We are committed to working with this outside expert, legislators and stakeholders to do a careful review and define meaningful areas to address within our child welfare system."

CWG worked in Iowa for several years beginning in 2000 on system evaluation and staff training and coaching efforts. It also participated in a focused evaluation of child safety in Iowa following a child death during that period.

"The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group already has a working knowledge of child welfare operations in Iowa and can quickly concentrate on the most relevant issues surrounding current concerns," said Paul Vincent, founder and director of the organization. "DHS was in contact with us rapidly following recent high-profile cases that have prompted the call for a review of the agency's policies and practices.

"We'll propose potential solutions based on current national evidence and decades of experience evaluating complex child welfare systems and laws," said Vincent.

Rickman said CWG will be on site in Iowa at least 6 times over the coming months, and that DHS will fully cooperate with the experts and legislators as they examine recent cases and the department's resources.

"We support this approach to having a fresh look at the system, from an outside expert, before making any rapid changes that could put kids at risk or put additional pressures on front-line workers," Rickman said. "We look forward to getting started quickly, and addressing next steps to help us continue to protect children."

Additional information about The Child Welfare Group and its experience can be found on its website at www.childwelfaregroup.org

More information on DHS and its programs is found at <http://dhs.iowa.gov/>

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