Kids in Care: Analysis of Population Trends and Management Processes in Montana’s Foster Care System

Child and Family Services Division
Department of Health and Human Service
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CFSD Regions

- Regional Offices
  - Region 1: Miles City
  - Region 2: Great Falls
  - Region 3: Billings
  - Region 4: Butte
  - Region 5: Missoula
  - Region 6: Kalispell

Figure: Pg. 1
The Multiple steps within SAMS

- Receive the Report
  - Report received by centralized intake investigated if criteria met

- Assess the Situation
  - Immediate danger assessment

- Is There Present Danger
  - If immediate danger is identified, a present danger plan is implemented

- Protection Plan
  - If the protection plan removes the child involuntarily from the home, an emergency protective services is filed.

- Family Function Assessment
  - If a family is completed in 30 days if child is removed from the home and 60 days if the child remains in the home

- Safety Threats
  - If impending safety threats are identified, an in or out of home safety plan is put in place

- Child Removal
  - If child is removed during investigative process, the court process begins
Audit Objective

- Has the safety-based model used by the Department of Public Health and Human Services to investigate alleged instances of child abuse or neglect led to an increase in the number of children in foster care in Montana?
Montana Comparison to Other States

- Child Welfare Agencies and Models Vary by State
- 16 Kids in Care per 1,000
- 2nd Highest in the Nation
Kids in Care Growth

- Montana’s Growth is 28% Higher than State with Second Highest Growth

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Reunification Rates
Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Removals

Montana’s 2019 percentage of removals where drug and alcohol abuse were a factor compared to the national average.
CFSD Internal Data

- Kids in Care Over Time
- Regional Comparisons
- Potential Drivers of Kids in Care
The number of Kids in Care has increased 126% since 2010, despite recent declines.
Regional Differences in Kids in Care

Region 5 has shown success in keeping kids out of care.
Length of Time in Care

2016
61% Longer than a Year

2019
48% Longer than a Year
Other Potential Drivers of Kids in Care

- Removal and Court Processes
- SAMS Process
- SAMS Implementation
Conclusion

- The SAMS model has identified more children who were subject to abuse and neglect according to the courts.
- This has increased the number of kids in care.
- Montana’s inconsistent implementation of the SAMS model, among other factors, has likely contributed to the increase in the number of kids in care.
Case Review

70 Cases from 2019 that Resulted in Kids in Care

Six Regional Offices and One Smaller Office in Each region

Reviewed SAMS Model Through the Court Process
SAMS Process Documentation and Guidance

Instruction on SAMS Documents Unclear or Contrary to Policy

Regional Practices Did Not Align with Policy in Some Cases
Incomplete SAMS Documentation

- 64% of Protection Plans not Completed
- 36% of FFA not Completed in Timeframes
- 40% of Cases Did not have a Safety Plan
SAMS Process Reviews

- Other states with similar models contract fidelity reviews
- Limited changes to SAMS since implementation
- CFSD reviews don’t focus on process change or documents
Recommendation #1

- We recommend the Department of Public Health and Human Services:
  A. Conduct a review of the SAMS model.
  B. Update SAMS documents.
Senior Staff and Management Training

- New Staff Training
  - Montana Child Abuse/Neglect Training
  - University of Montana Ongoing Training Program
- Ongoing Training to Ensure Model Buy In
- Fidelity Reviews in Other States
Recommendation #2

- We recommend the Department of Public Health and Human Services develop and provide ongoing training to regional administration.
Prevention Plans

Voluntary in-home agreements are inconsistently used.
Recommendation #3

- We recommend the Department of Public Health and Human Services:
  A. Determine through data-based measures that current efforts lead to an increased use of prevention plans.
  B. Adjust the program if it does not lead to results.
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS)

- Over $3 million Spent to Date
- Phase I Complete
- Phase II Ongoing and Delayed
Recommendation #4

- We recommend the Department of Public Health and Human Services:
  
  A. Modernize the child welfare system based on federal government guidance.
  
  B. Use the increased data capacity of this system to create and implement a data management plan.
Thank You