


# NM Child Abuse & Neglect Citizen Review Board

---

*Spotlight on:* Turnover among social workers at the Children, Youth, and Families Department.



*“Since my child went into custody nine months ago, I have been involved with six different social workers.”*

*“I was ripped away from my home and everything I had ever known. The only hope I had was my social worker.”*



*August 2000 - Interim Report*

*The Citizen Review Board is a project of New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families.*



“In a system where you have little to no support from your family, you need someone to cling to.. someone to help you feel less lonely.”

“When the new social worker introduced herself to me, I remember bursting into tears and running from the room. The one consistent thing in my life had been replaced with a newer model. When my social worker was replaced, I acted out in the only fashion I knew how to..badly.”

*Quotes from a former foster child.*

## Who Is Watching Out For The Children?

The social worker is *the* pivotal person in the child’s case. S/he is the one who:

- Manages the case — including being in contact with the parents, children, foster parents, and service providers.
- Ensures that parents and children receive necessary therapy and services.
- Submits and deals with paper work due to Medicaid Managed Care denials.
- Visits the children; often providing transportation to appointments.
- Helps the foster parents deal with the children and find new placements when placements disrupt. (520 children reviewed by CRB had 4 or more homes)
- Attends essential meetings such as court hearings.

**10 counties have a 30% or higher social worker vacancy rate<sup>1</sup>**

Social worker turnover and retention is a serious problem in most areas of the state. This problem seriously impacts the children, families and the system itself. The resultant under staffing causes the caseload of many social workers to increase. Even if caseloads are low, the high turnover rate of social workers has caused cases to be

handed from social worker to social worker, often with little information passed on. Short tenures and a high turnover rate means that young, and often inexperienced, social workers are dealing with complex problems in families they are ill-equipped to handle.

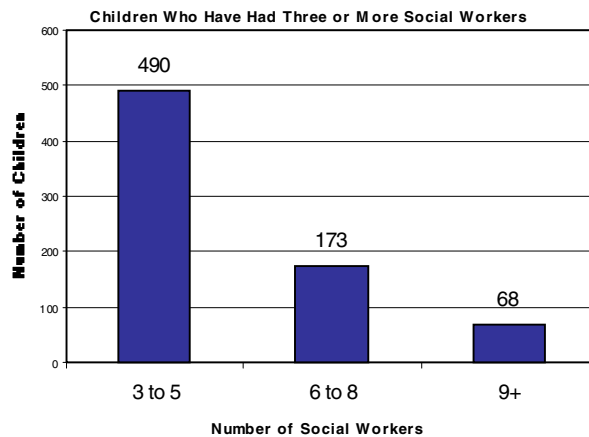
**The average length of employment for a social worker in PSD is approximately 1.7 years.<sup>2</sup>**

How can you, as the parent, get your child home if the person who manages your case is continually leaving?

Imagine what it must be like, for a young child, living in a foster home — wanting to go home — with the only connection being the ever-changing face of a new social worker...another stranger...

CRB sees the frightening consequences of social worker turnover on a regular basis. According to CRB data<sup>3</sup>, 731 children have had three or more social workers managing their case.

One of the most serious cases included is a child who came into custody at the end of December 1999, and has already had seven social workers. That is one social worker per month in custody. While this is an exceptional case, there are far too many children who experience extreme numbers of social workers. It is paradoxical that the system responsible for the coordination of foster care is often the cause of more disruption.



## Two Children, One Problem

Composites of typical cases that CRB reviews

### Tony's Story

Tony was six-months old when he first entered the Child Protective system. By the time he was fifteen months old he had lived with three different foster families; with three different sets of 'moms' and 'dads'. In the nine months he has been in custody, six social workers have walked into, and out of, his life. Tony's current social worker has been unable to visit him or his mother, because her caseload is too large. In the treatment unit, only three of six social worker positions are currently filled.

Trying to battle a ten year drug problem, Tony's mother was recently placed in a seven-day treatment program, but was denied further treatment by Medicaid Managed Care. Her subsequent relapse means that Tony's stay within the Child Protective system will be extended.

This case is complicated by Medicaid Managed Care's limitations or denials on the type and length of treatment for Tony and his mother, and by the deadlines imposed by the new substitute child care timelines.

### Marie's Story

In October 1996, when the police raided the home that Marie lived in, they found her playing on the floor next to various drugs and dirty needles. Marie's mother was arrested, while Marie entered the Child Protective system. At seven years old, she was placed in her first foster home and met her first social worker.

In the next three years, she would have eight social workers and seven homes. In May, Marie and her father reunited with the understanding that she would remain in the legal custody of the state. Social worker home visits and therapy in the home would monitor her safety.

Within in a few months of being at home, her social worker changed once again. Soon after, Medicaid Managed Care discontinued the in-home therapy that Marie and her family desperately needed. This time, no one came to visit Marie at home.

In this case, and many others, social workers are not remaining long enough to make the necessary visits or to follow-up on Medicaid Managed Care denials.

## CRB's Recommendations

For the sake of the children and families whose cases start over and over again with each new social worker, the New Mexico Child Abuse and Neglect Citizen Review Board recommends that the legislature conduct a full and independent review of the Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) to determine why the social worker turnover is so high including an examination of educational requirements<sup>4</sup>. Our hope is that the review would lead to legislatively mandated corrective action.

<sup>1</sup> Comments made by CYFD at a public meeting hosted by CYFD and the Child Welfare League of America on June 26, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> As stated in a letter to the Citizen Review Board State Advisory Committee from CYFD dated November 2, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Collected from cases reviewed July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> While New Mexico requires a master level social worker, many states employ foster care case managers who have a bachelors degree. This policy could help reduce turnover without compromising the care of children in custody.

\*Comments are from parents who were once part of the abuse and neglect system.

**“Many of the conditions and details about my child comes from the social worker. Then those details go to the court. The last time in court, the social worker hadn't even met me.”**

**“Since my child went into custody nine months ago, I have been involved with six different social workers. This has a negative effect on my progress. I have to continually explain and re-explain to each social worker.”**

## What is the Citizen Review Board?

The Citizen Review Board **has over 150 volunteers** staffing **33 local review boards** state wide. It is an independent project legislatively created by the State of New Mexico with a two part mandate:

- To review the cases of children in the custody of the state and make recommendations to the Judge who presides over the case.
- To make recommendations to the New Mexico Legislature, the Children, Youth & Families Department, and the courts regarding the statutes, policies, and procedures relating to substitute care.

**The volunteers who make up the New Mexico Citizen Review Board (CRB) have one goal: *that New Mexico's foster care system become the best it can be.*** We believe that the children who are abused and neglected deserve the best possible services and should be in a permanent home that provides love, nurturing, and protection as quickly as possible.

Each local review board hearing provides an opportunity for the parties involved in a case to present information pertinent to the child's/children's progress toward a permanent loving and safe home. The information gathered at these hearings form the basis for a written report with recommendations that the local board sends to the presiding Judge. Additionally, the state-wide compilation of the statistical data gleaned from these hearings (the number of homes each child has had, social worker turnover, the impact of managed care, etc.) provides the basis for CRB's recommendations to the legislature, the Children, Youth & Families Department, and the courts.

*We do not intend these observations to be a critique of CYFD. Blame really belongs to us all. We have been aware of the problem, but have not prioritized it so that effective corrective measures can be taken.*

## For More Information...

- Contact the Citizen Review Board central office in Albuquerque at (505) 842-8905, or toll free at (888) 836-2020.
- See the CRB Annual Report for additional recommendations and information (reported by state and by county) on the abused and neglected children of New Mexico.

If you want more information on a board in your area, they meet in the following locations:

Clovis	Albuquerque	Espanola
Farmington	Las Cruces	Deming
Bernalillo	Roswell	Carlsbad
Hobbs	Alamogordo	Gallup
Tucumcari	Taos	Las Vegas
Raton	Clayton	Grants
Socorro	Santa Fe	Silver City
Los Lunas	Truth or Consequences	

“There was one social worker who provided useful guidance, but she is now gone.”

“I’m looking forward to the day when my child and I can be reunited and live together as a family.”

“I believe I can get better with the necessary support. I look forward to developing a trusting and working relationship with someone who will stand by me and steer me in the right directions.”