

NM Child Abuse & Neglect Citizen Review Board

Spotlight On:

Drugs and Alcohol: The Tragic Story for Abused & Neglected Children



“Every time I walk into my special education class, I think about what my mother did to me. It is so hard sometimes, why did she take drugs?” - Katie, 14-year-old, adopted 10 years ago by her foster parents



“It feels so good when I take the drugs. I figured the baby had to be enjoying it too.”

- Katie's mother



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Albuquerque: (505) 842-8905
Statewide: (888) 836-2020
Website: www.nmcrb.org

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



Time Dilemma: Child's Needs vs. Parent's Needs

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- Home-based services – *brings treatment to family, compensates for lack of transportation and child care*
- Mother/child inpatient treatment – *intensive treatment while maintaining bonding and increasing motivation for change*
- After-care services – *to promote continued recovery, child safety and stability*
- Twelve-step programs – *organized peer support*
- Family drug court – *brings systems together and keeps case on track through the court's powers*
- Multi-agency coordination – *recognizes that families are often involved in several systems such as child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health*

Of the 1,560 children reviewed by the New Mexico Citizen Review Board (CRB) during July 1, 2000, to June 30, 2001:

- 67% had substance-abusing parents
- 231 children in custody were born with drug and/or alcohol in their system, often resulting in severe developmental and cognitive deficits
- 148 children in custody were reported to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol; 60 of these children are between the ages of 6 and 15

"In 1997, state child welfare agencies estimated that 67% of the parents of children in foster care had substance abuse problems but that they were able to serve less than one-third of those parents." Alcohol and Other Drug Surveys of State Child Welfare Agencies, Child Welfare League of America (1998)

Substance abuse is present in epidemic proportions in families who abuse and neglect their children. Substance abuse impacts the coping skills and parenting abilities of the user and the rest of the family. These families have chronic, complex and often multi-generational problems. Substance abuse is starting at younger ages, resulting in more damage to emotional maturity and social skills that impact parenting abilities.

The abuse and neglect system is charged with helping these children and families but limited treatment resources are available. The challenge in working with these families is defined not only by the multiple problems and the limited resources, but also by the typical recovery timeline for addicts. The child needs permanency as soon as possible, but the parent needs more time to recover than is permitted under current laws. To help these families, assessments and services must be appropriate and readily available to maximize the chance that the children and parents can be safely and permanently reunited. If reunification is not possible, the children must be moved to another permanent arrangement such as adoption or guardianship.

"Children whose parents abuse alcohol and other drugs are nearly three times as likely to be abused, and more than four times as likely to be neglected." No Safe Haven: Children of Substance-Abusing Parents by Jeanne Reid, Peggy Macchetto, and Susan Foster (1999).

All too often what is deemed "appropriate" treatment is really only what is available, or what Medicaid managed care will approve. Too often well trained and experienced treatment providers overlook the needs of the family in crisis as they seek to meet the needs of the substance abuser.

National research from the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reveals problems in six critical areas in child welfare systems when dealing with substance-abusing parents:

1. Lack of effective substance abuse screening and assessment practices
2. Lack of timely access to appropriate substance-abuse treatment and related services
3. Lack of strategies to motivate addicted parents
4. Lack of criteria or knowledge to inform decisions on when to return children to their families
5. Few efforts to prevent or prepare for relapse
6. The difficulty of determining when "reasonable efforts" have been made for substance-abusing parents and when adoption proceedings should begin

Desiree's Story – A composite of typical stories from CRB reviews

"If it's true that an addict can relapse on average 7 to 12 times before becoming sober, by the time they are ready for their child – the child is gone. Can we make the two timelines match?" - Quote from a CRB Board Member

Desiree is two years old. When she was born, she and her mother had drugs in their systems. Desiree's first months of life were consumed by her almost constant cries, while she went through withdrawal from the drugs her mother took while pregnant. Since then, Desiree has lived in foster homes except for hospital stays during her medical crises. She lives with foster parents who spend much of their time helping Desiree stay healthy and who take her to several weekly therapy sessions to overcome her cognitive and developmental problems. Desiree even has trouble eating – a result of prenatal drug exposure.

Her mother, Marie, is a longtime drug addict. Marie has been prostituting for the last few years to pay for her drugs. She loves Desiree, but becoming drug-free is so hard for her, and time is so short. Marie's social worker and attorney have been honest with her about the legal timelines in the abuse and neglect system, Marie has very little time to prove that she can become the mother that Desiree needs and deserves. On the other hand, Desiree has already spent her entire life in the custody of the state. She needs a permanent home now! If her mother is unable to provide her with a safe and nurturing home, then it must be with an adoptive family.

Marie believes that her recovery would be more effective if she could live somewhere with her daughter away from her drug suppliers and her friends who use drugs. Her social worker tells her that the only available treatment program has a waiting list months long. Meanwhile, Marie struggles to keep the dream alive that her child might come home, but it is not enough. Today, Marie found out she is pregnant again, and she is still using.

"I have been a CRB volunteer for over 10 years now. Cases are different; now there is more substance abuse, and families are facing more complicated problems. And at the same time, there are fewer treatment providers and the treatment time is shorter. How does this make sense?"

- CRB board member

The Benefits of Appropriate Treatment

Every *one dollar invested* in treatment programs *saves four to seven dollars* in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration effective comprehensive treatment, provided over 6 to 18 months for substance-abusing women and their children, resulted in:

- Improved parenting skills
- Use of fewer or no drugs
- No involvement with the criminal justice system
- Employment
- Reunited families
- Improved attendance in counseling
- Participation in ongoing support groups

Successful treatment reunites children with their parents in a safe and nurturing home.

CRB Recommendations

In recognition of two often conflicting timelines, the child's need for a stable and safe home and the parent's recovery needs, we must insure steps are taken in each child's case to maximize successful treatment in the time allotted:

- Increase funding to make substance-abuse treatment options available in all areas of New Mexico by implementing family drug courts, inpatient programs, and prevention efforts.
- Develop protocols and provide cross-training for social workers, treatment providers, and others to better coordinate efforts between the areas of substance abuse and child abuse and neglect.

"These poor innocent things! Drug babies do not comfort easily, you know. We try to make them as comfortable as possible but it is hard with their shaking bodies, rigid muscles, constant crying, and sensitivity to light and noise. I don't know how long we can continue to foster – the demands on this family are hurting our other children."

- Longtime foster parent

What Is The Citizen Review Board?

The Citizen Review Board has **over 160 volunteers** staffing **33 local review boards** statewide. 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. In light of this goal, the volunteers who review the cases of children in the Children, Youth, and Families Department's custody are aware that many people and agencies are involved in the complex foster care system - not just the agency that is responsible for the children. 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 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 reviews forms the basis for a written report with recommendations sent to the presiding judge. Additionally, the statewide compilation of the statistical data gleaned from these reviews provides the basis for CRB's annual and interim reports and recommendations to the legislature, the Children, Youth & Families Department, and the courts.

For More Information...

- Contact the Citizen Review Board central office in Albuquerque (505) 842-8905, or toll free at (888) 836-2020.
- Visit the CRB web-site at www.nmcrb.org for up-to-date information on what is happening to the abused and neglected children reviewed by CRB.
- 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 would like copies of our interim reports spotlighting other important issues in the abuse and neglect system, contact the CRB central office.

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

Alamogordo
Albuquerque
Bernalillo
Carlsbad
Clayton
Clovis
Deming
Espanola

Farmington
Gallup
Grants
Hobbs
Las Cruces
Las Vegas
Los Lunas
Raton

Roswell
Santa Fe
Silver City
Socorro
Taos
T or C
Tucumcari

“Delinquency is a recipe made up of poor parenting, school failure, exposure to substance abuse, lack of social skills, aggression and hyperactivity.”

A child psychiatrist quoted in the newspaper.

“Of every dollar spent, 96 cents are spent on... (courts, prisons, hospitals, child welfare, and special education), but less than 4 cents are spent on prevention, treatment, and research combined.”

Child Welfare League of America

“Be patient with me. I'm trying to quit but hey, I'm going to use. What scares me is that my social worker is telling me that at the next court hearing, my child's plan will change to adoption instead of returning to me. I'm really trying...”

- A drug-addicted mother