


Citizen Involvement in Child Welfare

 Collins-Camargo, C., Jones, B. L., & Krusich, S. (2009). What do we know about strategies for involving citizens in public child welfare: A review of recent literature and implications for policy, practice, and future research. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 3(3), 287-304.

WHAT ARE THESE RESOURCES?

This article reviews the research literature and makes recommendations to strengthen citizen participation in public child welfare systems, specifically programs such as Foster Care Review Boards (FCRB), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and Citizen Review Panels (CRP).

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

In order to foster greater community engagement, citizens have more frequently become included in child welfare programming and improvement efforts.

	Foster Care Review Boards	Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)	Citizen Review Panels (CRP)
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Composed of volunteers who review case files of children in foster care, and report to the court as to the progress being made on the achievement of permanency Provide some level of external accountability for the child welfare system in a given state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent volunteers conduct thorough investigations and make recommendations to the court regarding the best interests of children; able to advocate for controversial positions and dedicate more time and effort to collaborating with child and professionals due to low caseloads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess state and local child welfare agency compliance with CAPTA plans, coordination with Title IV-E, review child fatalities, evaluate CPS practice, protocol and policy, engage in public outreach
Summary of Research Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited research on FCRBs focuses on perceptions & process rather than outcome variables Need for closer examination by states, as FCRBs function differently from state to state and have varying levels of effectiveness, utilization and need for reform. Work needs to be done to improve case workers' perceptions of FCRBs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited study of the impact of CASAs Little indication to support the positive influence of CASA volunteers on permanency outcomes May be associated with fewer placements for children in foster care, a greater number of services provided, and lower recidivism rates, although actual impact of CASAs on these outcomes cannot be gleaned from available research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies of CRPs focus on the relationship between panels and the child welfare agency, and the perceived impact of the program on organizational and systemic changes, without examining the actual impact of this macro level form of citizen involvement

Citizen participation that seems superficial or is poorly implemented may only damage the situation. Current literature is insufficient to inform the field on the extent of actual impact of these programs.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

- Improvements to ensure greater effectiveness of citizen involvement programs include: (1) Processes for selection and screening; (2) In-depth orientation, training, and shadowing; (3) Clear expectations; (4) Logistical support and adequate resources; (5) Collaboration, trust-building activities, and use of a liaison; (6) Open communication and ongoing information sharing, evaluation, and feedback.
- Child welfare agency leadership must take a proactive approach to ensure that citizen participation is viewed positively within the organization and the courts.
- Child welfare agencies should strive to respect the time that is being donated to the same cause they work for, and find ways to integrate citizen volunteers as a genuine contribution to common goals.
- Citizen involvement programs must take steps to ensure recommendations are constructive and grounded in the complexities and realities of child welfare work.
- Steps must be taken to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of programs, provide feedback to participants, and build an evidence base on the topic of citizen participation in child welfare.