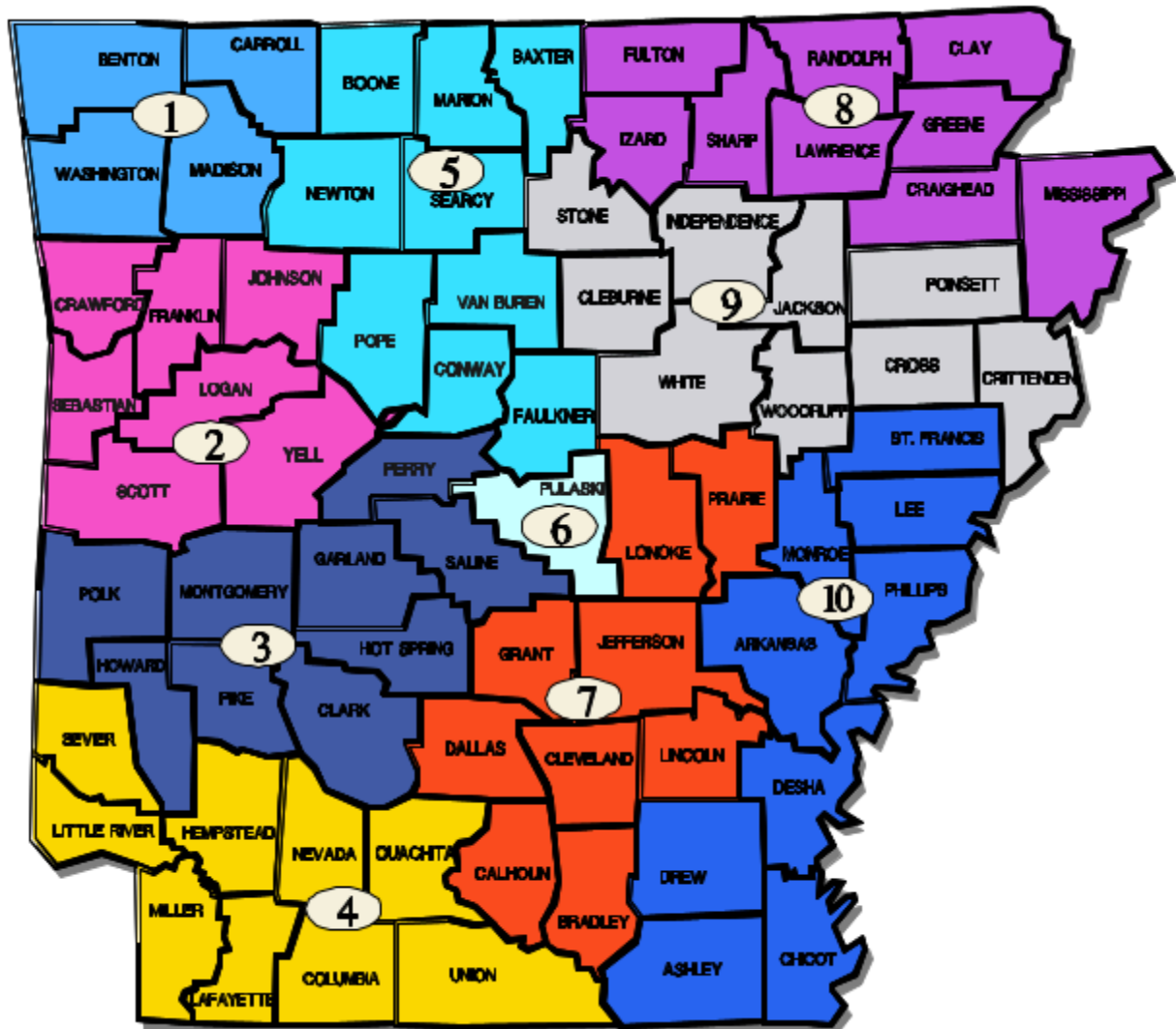


Lindsay McCoy | June 30, 2018



## Arkansas Citizen Review Panels

## Mission and Mandate

The Arkansas Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is committed to reviewing and evaluating the practices and procedures of the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The CRP is federally mandated through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA); Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003.

## Citizen Review Panel Coordinators

Lindsay McCoy-State Coordinator

Marilyn Sanders-Logan County Coordinator

Sherrie Graham-Columbia, Hempstead, Lafayette, Nevada, and Ouachita Coordinator

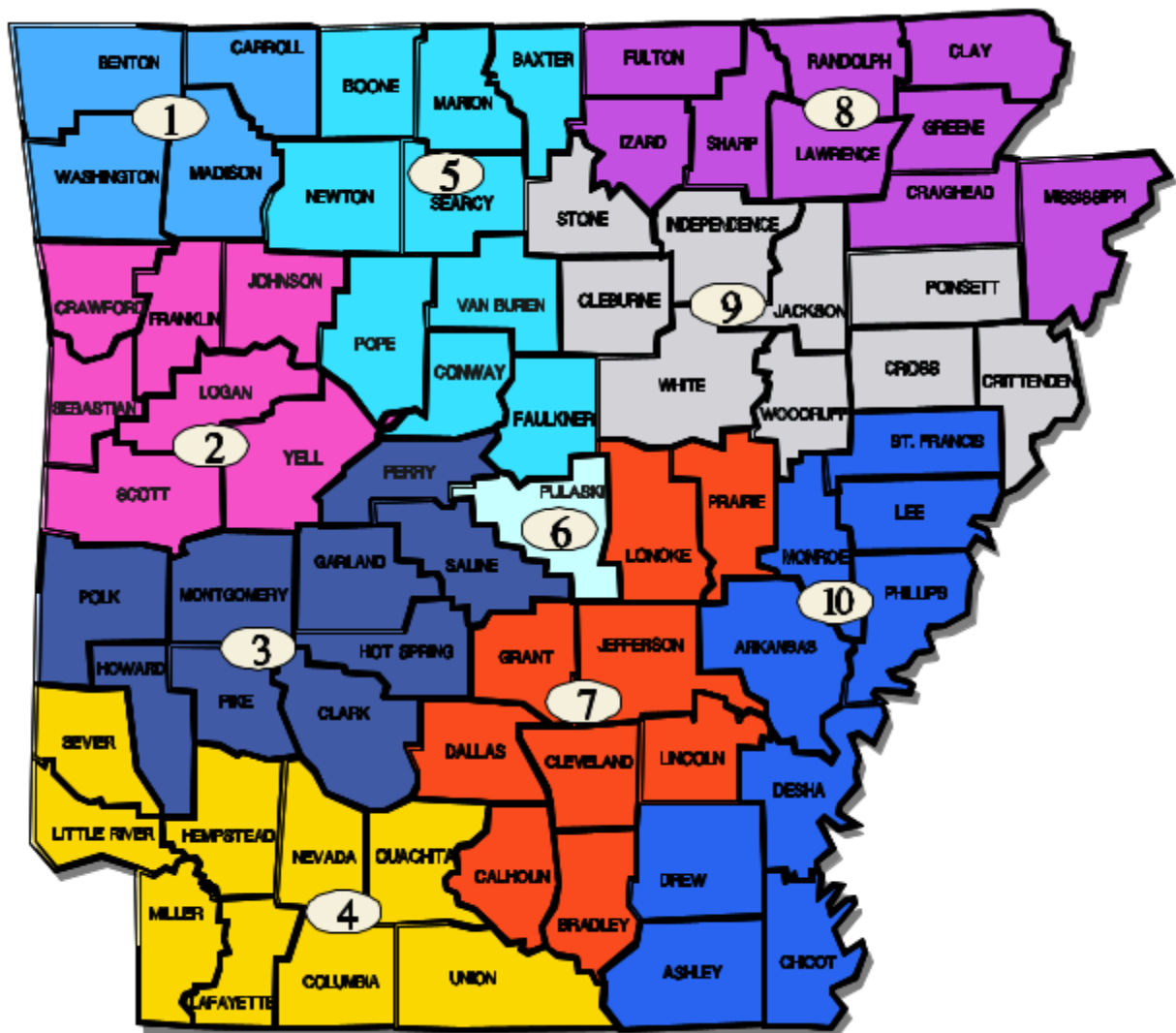
Jeffery Phillips-Pope County Coordinator

## Arkansas Citizen Review Program

Arkansas Citizen Review Panel Program was established in response to the 1996 amendment to CAPTA. Arkansas has three Citizen Review Panels in various counties throughout the state. The Panel Coordinators are citizens within the community who are passionate about improving the lives of children and families in Arkansas and strive to improve the child welfare system.

The panels are set-up on a purchase order agreement with the Division of Children and Family Services. The CRP Coordinators are overseen by the DCFS State Coordinator and receives administrative and technical support. The coordinator holds conference calls and semi-annual meetings with the coordinators to discuss various agenda topics such as short and long-term goals as well as hot topics noted in their counties. The panels update one another on achievements as well as barriers they encounter within their areas and brainstorm on ways to improve outcomes. The CRP state coordinator assisted in helping to identify short and long-term goals for the panels and provides child welfare information when requested.

## Logan County Citizen Review Panel



The Logan County Citizen Review Panel began in 2014 and is coordinated by Marilyn Sanders. The panel is comprised of members from DCFS, Crimes Against Children (CACD), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), The Call, Magazine School and other various members as required. The panel meets on an average of once per month and reviews various cases during each meeting including any child death that occurs within the county.

### Recommendations for the Child Welfare System

The Panel noted an area of concern regarding the Central Registry's release of audio and/or video recordings that are released when a subject of the report requests a copy of the file. The Panel noted concerns of the possible release of

information by the subject of the report, which could jeopardize the confidentiality of the victim child.

The Panel also identified a lack of storage space within the DHS office. The Logan County Panel attempted to obtain a storage unit to be utilized by DCFS staff but this was not accomplished during the reporting period and remains a barrier for staff.

### Accomplishments

Logan County CRP coordinated with CASA and Toys for Tots to provide Christmas presents for the foster children in the county. Panel members placed pin wheels on the lawn of the DHS Office to bring awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month. In order to gain additional foster homes for Logan County the Panel has five informational meetings set up during the course of the year to provide information about becoming a foster parent. The Logan County CRP hosted a booth at Frontier Day in Paris to recruit foster homes for The CALL. Logan County Currently has five foster homes and forty-nine foster children.

A meeting took place with the Prosecuting Attorney to discuss eliminating malicious reporters. The Prosecutor was not aware or did not know the process of how to obtain reporter information and child maltreatment investigative files.

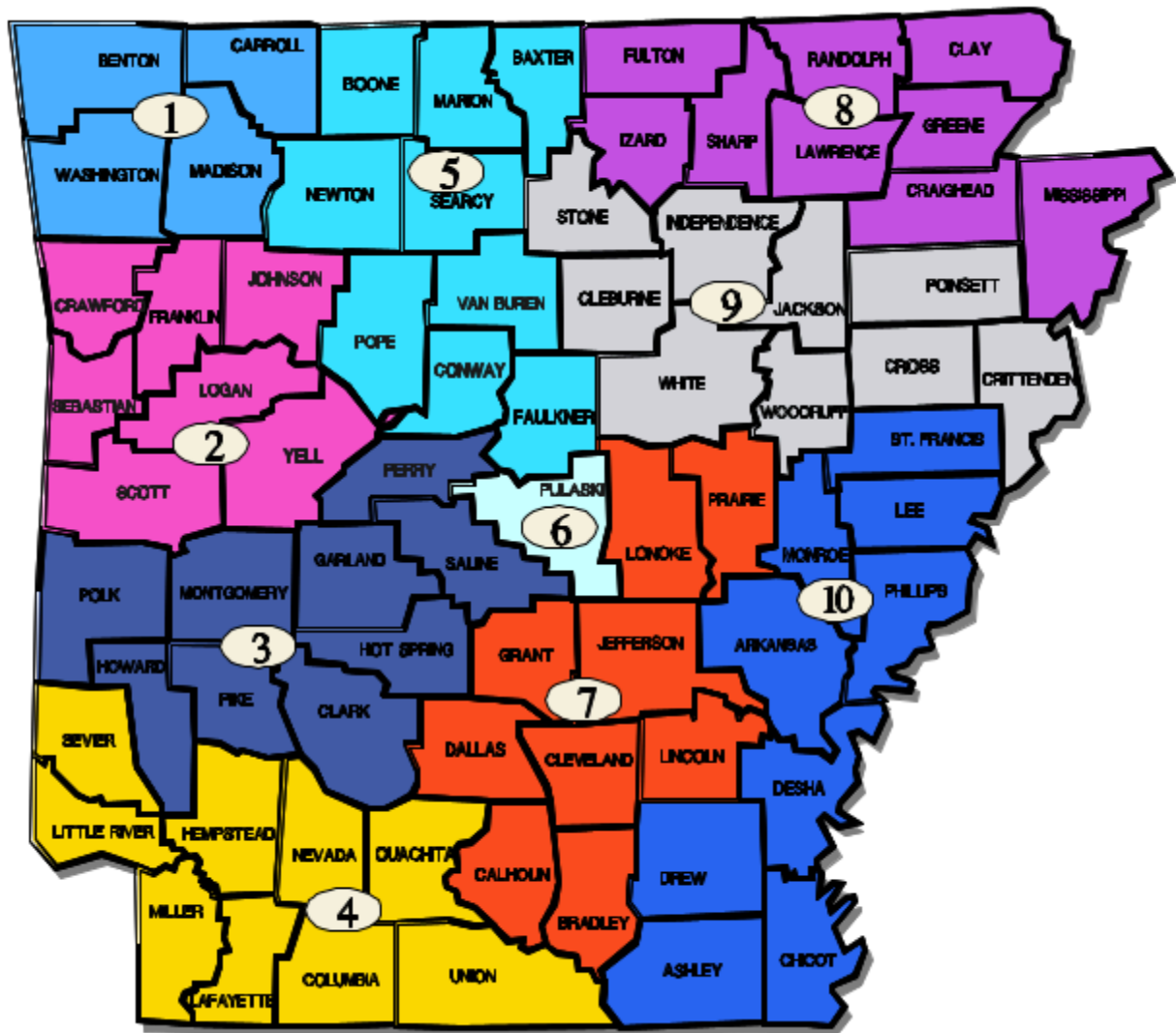
## States' Response to the Recommendations

While DCFS understands the concerns of the Logan County Citizen Review Panel, the Central Registry Unit is compliant with the law which allows certain individuals to obtain copies of investigative files. The following is the specific law which is written in the Child Maltreatment Act: *Ark. Code Ann. § 12-18-101 et seq., provides that child maltreatment reports maintained by the Arkansas Department of Human Services ("DHS") are confidential. Disclosure of said reports is limited to the persons enumerated in the CMA. See Ark. Code Ann. §§ 12-18-104, 12-18-501, 12-18-620(a), 12-18-709(a), 12-18-710(a), 12-18-909(a), 12-18-910(a). DHS is prohibited from releasing information to any person or third-party not enumerated in the CMA, written authorizations notwithstanding.*

*Persons included in the CMA to which disclosure is made are "subjects of the report." A subject of the report is defined as: The offender; custodial and noncustodial parents, guardians, and legal custodians of the child who is subject to suspected maltreatment; or the child who is the subject of suspected maltreatment. See Ark. Code Ann. § 12-18-103(21).*

DCFS often struggles with storage space specifically due to the need to store foster children's items and cleaning supplies. The Coordinator will follow-up with the Logan County Supervisor to discuss barriers as it relates to storage. Some counties throughout the state have obtained donated storage containers and with the landlord's permission have been able to store them on the DHS property for easy access.

## Columbia, Hempstead, Lafayette, Nevada, and Ouachita County Citizen Review Panel



The Columbia, Hempstead, Lafayette, Nevada, and Ouachita County CRP is located in the Area 4 service area of the state and is coordinated by Sherrie Graham. The Area 4 CRP is the most established panel in Arkansas and has been operational since 2007. The panel is made up of members from the Division of

Children and Family Services, the Child Safety Center, Crimes Against Children Division, the Prosecutor's Office, local law enforcement, mental health, juvenile probation and various other members as required. The panel meets on an average of once per month and reviews various cases during each meeting including any child death that occurs within the county.

#### Recommendations for the Child Welfare Agency

The Area 4 CRP Panel expressed concerns with the amount of turnover with DCFS staff and would like the staff to have opportunities to shadow seasoned staff. The team also feels the case plans developed by the caseworkers are often generic and do not seem to address the specific needs of the families that are involved in the child welfare system.

The Panel also has concerns with mandated reporters calling reports to the child abuse hotline anonymously, which limits the amount of information the investigator is able to obtain during the course of the investigation.

#### Accomplishments

The Panel provided pack and plays to twenty families in need of safe sleep environments for their young children. The team is researching programs that provide diapers and diaper supplies to families in need and will model their programs if possible. The Panel provided emergency clothing and shoes for several children when they entered foster care throughout the year.

The Logan CRP members are participating in the Southwest Child Death Review Team.

### State's Response to the Recommendations

DCFS has struggled with staff retention for a long period of time. In order to combat the retention issue Arkansas implemented a graduated caseload in July 2017, which was modeled from a similar program in Oklahoma. The following is a chart that outlines the schedule for the graduated caseloads schedule:

5 secondary cases	Week 3 of Foundations course
10 secondary cases	Upon completion of Foundations course
Ten primary cases in the duty area of the completed Concentration 1 Training and two secondary cases	Upon completion of Concentration 1

*Note: secondary cases must be outside the duty area of primary case assignments and at least one secondary must be a foster care case if none of the primary assignments are foster care cases	
15 primary cases and at least one secondary foster care case assignment if none of the primary assignments are in foster care	Upon completion of all 3 Concentrations courses
75% of full county caseload or up to 22 primary cases and at least one secondary foster care case assignment if none of the primary assignments are in foster care	9 months of employment
100% of full county caseload	1 year of employment

DCFS hopes to retain staff by utilizing graduated caseloads, which should help new staff to not be as overwhelmed and will provide ample training time. Training for new Family Services Workers was re-written and was implemented on July 1, 2017. The new version of training incorporates some on line formatting and is broken up by job concentrations. All staff must complete the entirety of the training within the first year of their employment. The training also has an evaluation component to ensure the efficacy of the training which includes bringing in the Family Service Workers' Supervisor for feedback on their level of work readiness. The agency contracts with the University of Arkansas which provides one year of field training to new staff. The Agency is hopeful that the new strategies will lend to staff retention.

As for concerns with generic case planning, information will be conveyed to the CANS/FAST Program Manager. The concerns will be addressed and if needed a training can be scheduled with caseworkers in the county.

According to the Child Maltreatment Act Mandated reports are able to report anonymously if they report through certain avenues. The following is the law that pertains to Mandated Reporters: 12-18-302

(a) As prescribed under this section, a mandated reporter under this chapter may report child maltreatment or suspected child maltreatment by telephone call, facsimile transmission, or online reporting.

(b) Facsimile transmission and online reporting may be used in nonemergency situations by an identified mandated reporter under this chapter who provides the following contact information:

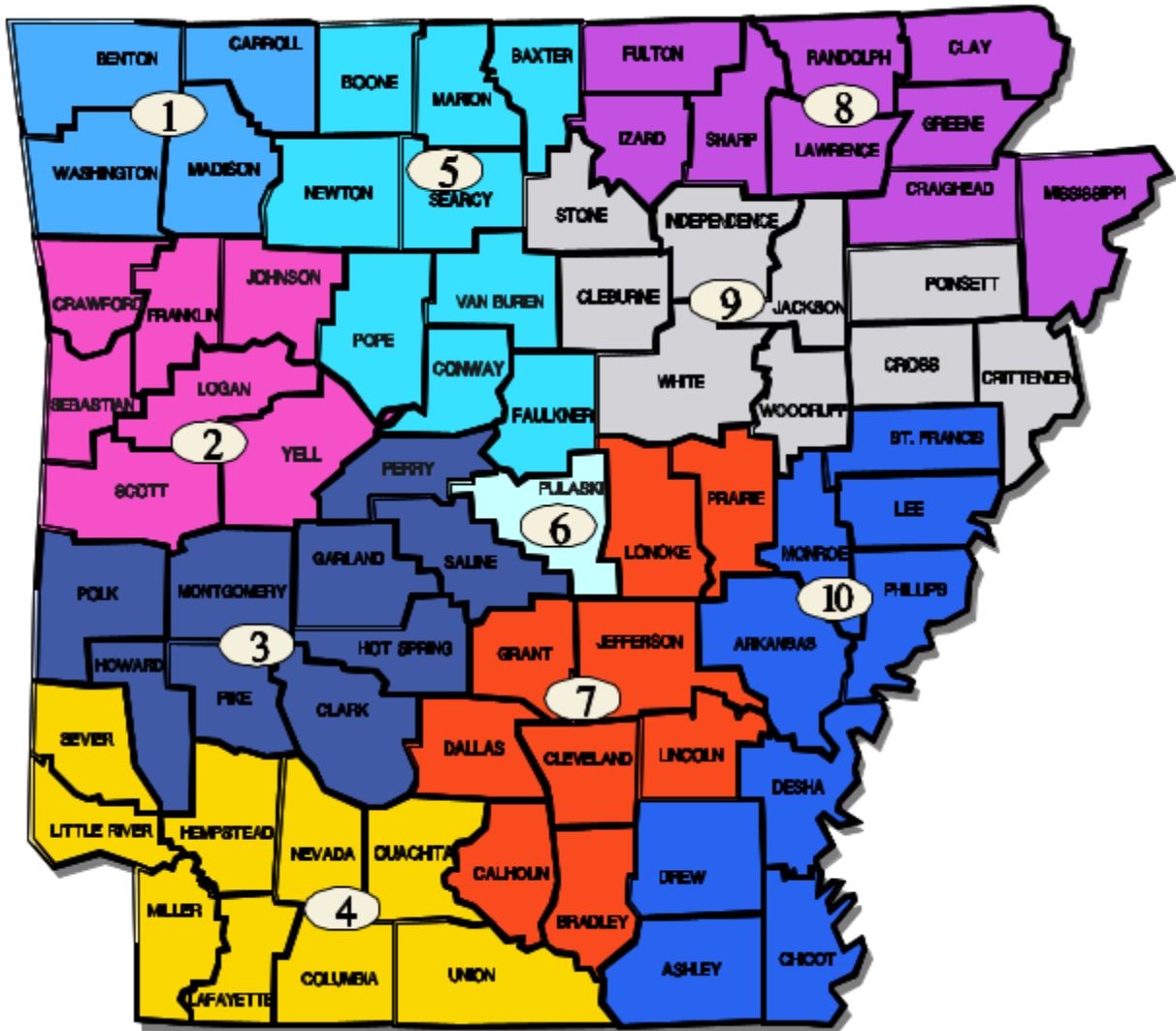
(1) Name and phone number; and

(2) In the case of online reporting, the email address of the identified mandated reporter under this chapter.



- (c) The Child Abuse Hotline shall provide confirmation of the receipt of a facsimile transmission via a return facsimile transmission or via online receipt.
- (d) A mandated reporter under this chapter who wishes to remain anonymous shall make a report through the Child Abuse Hotline toll-free telephone system.

## Pope County Citizen Review Panel



The Pope County Citizen Review Panel is coordinated by Jeffery Phillips and was established in 2014. The Pope CRP is comprised of members from DCFS, CACD, local mental health, local law enforcement, as well as other individuals as required. The CRP typically meets monthly and reviews a variety of case including all child deaths that occurred within the county.



### Recommendations for the Child Welfare Agency

The team is concerned with DCFS staff shortages (including supervisors). The Pope County CRP also noted a shortage of foster homes that are trained and willing to foster children with special needs.

### Accomplishments

The Pope County CRP partnered with Joseph's House and provided support to the house. The team also participated in Child Abuse Prevention Month by attending the Mayor's Proclamation Ceremony and placed pinwheels around the city to raise awareness.

The Pope County CRP was heavily involved in the planning and implementation of the Child Advocacy Center in Russellville. An advisory board was formed in August 2017 which was comprised of 5 members from the CRP. The Child Advocacy Center was opened in late March 2018 and has conducted more than 40 forensic interviews so far.

## State's Response to the Recommendations

DCFS has struggled with staff retention for a long period of time. In order to combat the retention issue Arkansas implemented a graduated caseload in July 2017, which was modeled from a similar program in Oklahoma. The following is a chart that outlines the schedule for the graduated caseloads schedule:

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75% of full county caseload or up to 22 primary cases and at least one secondary	9 months of employment

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DCFS is familiar with the need to gain additional foster homes which include homes that are willing and equipped to foster children with special needs. The agency obtained a grant to address foster care recruitment and will specifically be recruiting families that can meet the needs of the areas' foster care population. The Diligent Recruitment Grant allowed each area to hire a Community Engagement Specialist whose focus is to engage the community and recruit foster parents that are willing to foster children with disabilities, children over the age of 6, and sibling groups, which is DCFS's greatest need.

## Continued Collaboration

DCFS and the Citizen Review Panels will continue working closely with one another throughout the next state fiscal year. A meeting will be held in the fall to allow the Panels Coordinators time to interact with one another and discuss successes and goals the panels are working toward. DCFS will be discussing whether to add an additional panel over the next few months.